

**HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR HEREFORDSHIRE**

**DRAFT POLICY FRAMEWORK**

**Introduction**

1. Recent Government policy has highlighted the importance of school meals in contributing to health and education outcomes. Strategic frameworks, 'Changes for Children: Every Child Matters' and the public health white paper 'Choosing Health', both emphasise the important contribution school meals make to child health and attainment. In addition the new Ofsted school inspection process to commence Autumn 2005 will enable school food provision to be inspected.
2. There is considerable experience reported by Herefordshire schools that pupil's attention and behaviour improves following the introduction of breakfast clubs and better lunches.
3. In parallel with this policy context, school meals provision in Herefordshire is undergoing change in both contractual arrangements with caterers, and in the system of production and delivery.
4. Therefore the time is right to raise the profile of school meal provision in Herefordshire, and to ensure that it is given the necessary emphasis and resources in local strategic processes.
5. The purpose of this document is to create a policy framework of relevant standards, which will ensure schoolchildren in Herefordshire are supplied with wholesome, appetising and nutritionally balanced school meals.

This document is a policy framework not a contract specification but the principles contained in this framework should be expanded and made explicit in any contractual arrangements with caterers.

**Aim**

The Council strategy aims to ensure that every school meal provided by caterers in Herefordshire, is prepared to a consistently high standard of nutrition, palatability and appearance, and can make a significant contribution to the development and maintenance of healthier eating habits.

**Objectives**

Within the overall strategy it is proposed:

1. To increase the uptake of school meals in Herefordshire by ensuring standards of nutrition, palatability and appearance are raised where needed and consistently maintained.
2. To ensure every school meal provided is of consistently high quality and produced with a minimum of 80% fresh ingredients.
3. To raise the number of cooked school lunches provided in the county by enabling high schools to increase the number of primary schools they can supply, to achieve universal hot meal provision by 2008.

4. To improve the transport network so that more outlying primary schools are able to offer their children cooked school lunches.
5. To promote the adoption of whole school approaches to food as specified in the Food in Schools Toolkit.
6. To ensure the school meal service can make a positive contribution to local environmental sustainability targets.

### **Health Issues**

Nutritional status has both an immediate and long-term impact on health and well-being. Immediate impacts of poor nutrition on children and adolescents include anaemia, dental caries, obesity and susceptibility to illness. Long term impacts include obesity, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and impaired bone health. Furthermore the psychological impact of low self-esteem due to being overweight or obese is considerable.

Nationally 22% of boys and 28% of girls aged 2-15 are classified as overweight or obese. There is no evidence to suggest that Herefordshire children differ, in fact due to low levels of children walking or cycling to school, the incidence of overweight and obesity amongst Herefordshire children is probably greater. Of major concern is that these levels are continuing to rise. If current eating and physical activity habits are maintained, many thousands of children will experience a life of ill health and poor self-image.

Schools alone cannot reverse these eating patterns, but they can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem. In particular for many children the lunch provided at school will be the main meal of the day and will make a significant contribution to childhood nutrition.

In addition there is increasing evidence that inadequate levels of nutrition contribute to poor behaviour and reduced academic performance. Children who enjoy and benefit nutritionally from appetising and wholesome school lunches within the context of a whole school approach to food, are less likely to consume high fat, high sugar, additive rich snack foods with their negative impact on behaviour and learning.

### **Policy Context**

The strategic framework 'Every Child Matters' puts an obligation on all agencies that work with children to promote the health of children. Whilst Herefordshire Council has no direct responsibility to provide school meals, (other than for children entitled to free school meals) it has a clear role to ensure that contractual arrangements encourage and enable healthy eating in county schools, and that the Government target of universal hot meal provision is met by 2008. This is further endorsed in its Corporate Plan, where Herefordshire Council makes a clear commitment to improving the health of children and young people.

### **Current Position (See Appendix 1)**

Within the scheme for Local Management of Schools (LMS), schools are responsible for the provision of school meals with catering companies obliged to maintain kitchens. At present, school meals are provided by a network of caterers operating from 24 production kitchens sited in various schools. Meals are then transported to schools without kitchens. This system provides 12000 meals, 1800 free school meals and 200 sandwich packs daily, out of a total school

population of approximately 24000. Therefore 58% of Herefordshire children are supplied with a meal daily.

Each school governing body negotiates a contract of service provision with its caterer. There is very little emphasis given to nutrition standards, palatability and healthy cooking practices in the current contract specification although any new contracts drawn up will see greater emphasis on healthier cooking principles and a whole school commitment to improving food provision.

### ***Recommendation 1***

**The Herefordshire LMS scheme should be amended to ensure that the contractual arrangements between school governors and caterers refer to specific nutritional standards, and place unequivocal obligations on the caterer to provide wholesome, palatable and attractively presented meals.**

### **Proposed New System**

Given that it is not financially viable to ensure that all 104 schools have high quality kitchens, it is proposed that Herefordshire Council will provide funding and resources to enable high school kitchens to supply their surrounding feeder primary schools with lunches. This will entail the upgrading and improvement of several high school kitchens and the improvement in the method of transportation.

Existing production kitchens in primary schools will be encouraged to be maintained but in terms of refurbishment costs, high schools will receive priority, unless it is more practicable for a primary school kitchen to become one of the major production facilities. A flexible approach to this concept is essential with achievement of the aims and objectives of this policy paramount.

Herefordshire Council proposes to increase the unit cost for free school meal entitlement from £1.25 to £1.35 and will consult on the option of adding a pudding for a unit cost of £1.45.

If healthy cooking practices are to be enabled, for example more cooking from fresh ingredients rather than using processed foods, the time that catering staff are contracted for, must be significantly increased. There may also be an increased ingredient cost but estimates for this vary. This must be specified in the new contractual arrangements and additional funding provided with a recognition of the need for additional training.

There is currently no steering group or management committee which oversees the contracting, production, delivery and presentation of school meals in Herefordshire. If the proposed changes in the system are to be effective, relevant organisations, schools and businesses must work together.

### ***Recommendation 2***

**A School Meals Steering Group should be established with a mandate and authority to ensure the aim and objectives of this policy are met. The group should include representatives from catering, education, dieticians, local purchasing groups and other appropriate personnel, including service users.**

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### Summary of Additional Funding Arrangements

The Government has announced its intention to provide additional funding to local authorities and schools from September 2005 in order to further the development of a high quality sustainable school meals service. A condition of this funding is the requirement to reintroduce the provision of universal hot meals by September 2008.

The funds will be distributed by two grants, Targeted School Meals and School Meals.

The Targeted Grant will be given to local authorities to improve the current service in the most appropriate way for example by providing training, supporting additional hours or underpinning expenditure on ingredients. This amounts to approximately £ 90k for Herefordshire for each of the next three years.

The School Meals Grant will be paid to authorities via the Standards Fund in October for distribution direct to schools, with the purpose of ensuring that school meals meet the nutritional standards which will become mandatory in September 2006. It amounts to approximately £1000 for each primary school and £ 1500 for secondary. In addition a small sum will be allocated per pupil.

Further details of these grants will be found in the appendix.

### Nutritional Guidelines

The Government is expected to produce new minimum nutritional standards in the Autumn of 2005. These nutrient based standards will become mandatory from September 2006. Current minimum standards are basic and caterers should be expected to produce food that exceeds these standards.

Several organisations have produced guidance to help school caterers provide nutritionally balanced, appetising meals. For example 'Food for Life: The Soil Association School Meals Action pack' is highly regarded and 'Feed me Better' by Jamie Oliver contains many useful menus. At the very least caterers should familiarise themselves with DfEE guidance 'Healthy School Lunches' which contains practical guidance on how to incorporate nutritional standards.

### Healthier Cooking Principles

Caterers have a role not only in the production of healthy meals, but in contributing to the broader issues of food in the curriculum and in supporting a whole school approach to food.

The use of fresh ingredients, seasonal menus and where possible locally procured food will contribute to the learning, appreciation and enjoyment of food by school children and hopefully to the inculcation of healthy eating habits.

#### *Recommendation 3*

**Contractual arrangements with caterers should include a commitment to use fresh ingredients, seasonal bias to menus and where possible, locally produced foodstuffs. A target of 80% fresh or unprocessed ingredients is currently recommended.**

### **Local Procurement of Ingredients**

Enabling children to understand the link between growing and cooking is an important component of developing healthy eating habits and learning to appreciate good food. In addition the school meals service has a vital role to play in contributing to the local economy and in encouraging environmentally sustainable food production.

The Bulmer's Foundation is currently working with a group of schools with the aim of improving local supply networks and increasing the availability of food grown using environmentally sustainable methods.

#### ***Recommendation 4***

**Schools should be encouraged to source ingredients from suppliers that contribute to the local economy and meet environmental sustainability targets.**

### **Training**

As part of their commitment to improving school lunches, catering companies must ensure that their staff are trained appropriately to enable them to understand and apply principles of healthier cooking. This would lead to an increase in food preparation using fresh or unprocessed ingredients and a decrease in the use of ready-processed foods. This is in addition to basic food hygiene training which is compulsory for all food handlers. When submitting contract tenders, caterers must include staff training and development plans.

#### ***Recommendation 5***

**Herefordshire Council should ensure that contractors initiate processes that enable the training and development of contracted catering staff to be monitored and evaluated, leading to improvement in their ability to cook more healthily.**

### **Kitchen Design and Specification**

The design and equipping of kitchen facilities is an important factor in the ability of catering staff to incorporate healthier cooking practices. For example griddles and brat pans are preferable to fryers and surface preparation space should be maximised. In addition the dining room environment is an important factor in encouraging healthier eating. A calm, well organised unhurried lunchtime is more conducive to eating proper nutritionally balanced meals, rather than 'grab and go' fast food.

#### ***Recommendation 6***

**Relevant appropriate specialist advice should be sought when school kitchens are upgraded to ensure healthier cooking practices are enabled. This will require a programmed plan of refurbishments. In addition, the dining room environment should encourage rather than discourage healthier eating habits.**

### **Purchasing Issues**

Herefordshire Council is committed to reducing waste, encouraging recycling, reducing the environmental impact of excess food miles and not supporting the use of genetically modified crops. Contractual arrangements should make reference to these important issues, and the *school meal steering group* should provide advice and guidance to caterers on how best to fulfil these commitments.

### **Monitoring**

The effective monitoring of school meal provision is essential to ensure that school meals are produced to a high standard across the county throughout the academic year. It is unacceptable that some children are able to eat healthy nutritious food at one school but not at others.

#### ***Recommendation 7***

**Herefordshire Council must introduce effective monitoring processes to enable schools to be confident that children in their care are able to eat healthy, nutritious, appetising meals, produced with minimal environmental impact. These processes could include direct food sampling and consultation with children and parents.**

### **Conclusion**

In order to secure improvements to the school meals service, Herefordshire Council is taking a strategic approach. If the recommendations in this document are put into practice Herefordshire will see great improvements to its school meals service but additional investment will be required. Some improvements to the contractual process have already been initiated, with contractors required to state from where they intend to purchase ingredients and to submit staff training plans but there is a great deal yet to achieve.

School meals represent a great deal more than satisfying hunger at lunchtimes. They are an expression of the commitment of a school to the health and welfare of its children. Schools cannot claim to be healthy if the food that is served does not reinforce messages learnt in the curriculum.

Similarly caterers cannot claim to provide quality food if their meals do not encourage healthy eating and contribute to wider health and education and environmental targets.

Although Herefordshire Council has no direct duty to provide meals in schools (except for children entitled to free school meals), their commitments to improving the health and well-being of children, give it an essential role in ensuring every child is able to access health promoting, rather than health damaging food.

### **Acknowledgments**

To be completed following consultation.

**Julian Reeves Health Development Co-ordinator July 2005**

**Appendix 1: Recommendations**

- 1. The Herefordshire LMS scheme should be amended to ensure that the contractual arrangements between school governors and caterers refer to specific nutritional standards, and place unequivocal obligations on the caterer to provide wholesome, palatable and attractively presented meals.**
  
- 2. A *School Meals Steering Group* should be established with a mandate and authority to ensure the aim and objectives of this policy are met. The group should include representatives from catering, education, dieticians, local purchasing groups and other appropriate personnel, including service users.**
  
- 3. Contractual arrangements with caterers should include a commitment to use fresh ingredients, seasonal bias to menus and where possible, locally produced foodstuffs. A target of 80% fresh or unprocessed is currently recommended.**
  
- 4. Schools should be encouraged to source ingredients from suppliers that contribute to the local economy and meet environmental sustainability targets.**
  
- 5. Herefordshire Council should ensure that contractors initiate processes that enable the training and development of contracted catering staff to be monitored and evaluated, leading to improvement in their ability to cook more healthily.**
  
- 6. Relevant appropriate specialist advice should be sought when school kitchens are upgraded to ensure healthier cooking practices are enabled. This will require a programmed plan of refurbishments. In addition, the dining room environment should encourage rather than discourage healthier eating habits.**
  
- 7. Herefordshire Council must introduce effective monitoring processes to enable schools to be confident that children in their care are able to eat healthy, nutritious, appetising meals, produced with minimal environmental impact. These processes could include direct food sampling and consultation with children and parents.**

## **Appendix 2 Current arrangements for the provision of school meals in Herefordshire**

1. The provision of meals in primary and secondary schools is a fully delegated responsibility but special schools are obliged to provide a two-course hot meal.
2. In the case of **pupils entitled to free school meals** in primary and secondary schools, the Council provides either a sandwich pack, or a fixed price (equivalent to the cost of a sandwich pack) contribution in schools that offer their pupils a meals service.
3. Under delegated arrangements, it is for to schools to decide the nature of their school meals service, at a level and cost appropriate to their needs and means. Schools are advised that, if they wish to take up a hot meals service, especially if they are small, they will generally have to subsidise the overall service out of their school budgets.
4. The funding formula provides a school with a “social deprivation” weighting which varies according to the percentage of free school meal entitlements. The higher the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, the greater the funding allowance in the formula.
5. Approximately one third of schools have their own production kitchens and a further third have hot meals transported to the school. Catering arrangements vary. All high schools and some larger primary schools are able to offer a cafeteria-style service, using independent or contract caterers. Where a cafeteria service is not possible, schools choose whether to provide pupils with a basic lunch (for example, sandwiches or jacket potatoes), a single standard meal, a two-course standard meal, or a choice from a limited menu. Both the level of service and the charge to parents would be the subject of prior consultation.
6. The DfES Nutritional standards legislation requires schools to make available a meal to a pupil, on a payment basis, if their parents request it. Potentially, this requirement places rural schools not currently operating a meals service in a difficult position. However, since the legislation does not require the meal to be hot, nor the school to subsidise the service, it would normally be possible for the schools catering officer to make an arrangement on behalf of the school. In remote locations the cost may be higher than parents would wish.
7. Schools also differ in the extent to which they are willing to subsidise the arrangement to achieve a desired level of service. Some schools subsidise their arrangements by, for example, paying some premises and equipment costs or for the cost of transporting hot food to the school if they have no kitchen on site. Others are willing to pay their caterer more per meal than they would receive from parents. Many schools provide a higher level of service for pupils entitled to free meals than the basic amount allocated to them for a sandwich lunch.
8. The decision to provide hot meals, the type of service and the level of subsidy are matters that school governors should take into consideration along with the needs of their pupils, the level of parental support and the importance they place on this aspect of their service. It should be noted that the Government are requiring universal hot meal provision by September 2008.
9. The amount delegated to primary and high schools is £225 per year per entitled pupil, which amounts to £1.25 per meal. That for special schools is £270 per year per entitled pupil, equivalent to £1.50 per meal. Additionally, a further sum of £74 per year per non-entitled pupil is delegated to special schools so that all their pupils may have a hot meal.



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10. Where the cost of providing a meal greatly exceeds their delegated budget for example smaller isolated schools without kitchens and no transported meals, the Council can provide sandwich packs. The cost for this service is £31,000 per year.

**A school meals service focused on high schools supplying feeder primaries**

**Comments:**

**Recommendation 1; New contractual arrangements**

**Comments:**

**Recommendation 2; School Meals Steering Group**

**Comments:**

**Recommendation 3; Fresh ingredients**

**Comments:**

**Recommendation 4; Local sourcing**

**Comments:**

**Recommendation 5; Training of kitchen staff**

**Comments:**

**Recommendation 6; Kitchen design**

**Comments;**

**Recommendation7; Monitoring**

**Comments:**

