



meeting      **HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE**

date              12 April 2005              agenda item number

## **Food, Exercise and Diet in Schools project (FEDS)**

### **FINAL REPORT**

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 This paper presents the final report to the Health Select Committee of the Food, Exercise and Diet in Schools project (FEDS).

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Health Select Committee was given a number of presentations in early 2004 surrounding the issue of healthy eating. It was determined by this Committee that a scrutiny review into healthy eating and exercise should be undertaken involving Nottinghamshire schools. The main focus of the project would be on the prevention of child obesity which is a key concern across the UK.
- 2.2 The Committee subsequently established the Food, Exercise and Diet in Schools project (FEDS) with the remit to undertake a mapping exercise around food, exercise and diet initiatives, including the availability of cooking in Nottinghamshire schools, and their impact on the promotion of health equalities.
- 2.3 The FEDS project was overseen by a project steering group with representatives from a number of different agencies including head teachers, school governors, the regional government office (GO-EM) and Primary Care Trusts. In addition the group included representatives from Nottinghamshire County Council's Education, Environment, Culture and Community and Chief Executive's Departments. The steering group was lead by Chris Gilbert with support from Matthew Garrard both from the Scrutiny Team at County Council.
- 2.4 The project's outcomes were to map and produce a list of initiatives currently undertaken in schools, a compilation of evidence of each programme's success or otherwise from a school's perspective, and an overview of

suggested further uses of the data (for example, links with work around educational attainment already underway) and the group itself. At the very minimum the FEDS project was to provide the Committee, schools and educational personnel with a detailed overview of programmes across the county and help to facilitate the implementation of successful initiatives between and across schools. It was to highlight projects which complement each other and also enable any gaps to be identified.

- 2.5** Funding was obtained via a bid for the project from the Government Office of the East Midlands (GO-EM) of £3,000 which will be used predominantly to produce an information pack for distribution to interested parties at the project's conclusion.
- 2.6** The project was given a completion date of 12 April 2005 where a final report would be submitted to the Health Select Committee for forwarding to Cabinet. The FEDS project has been listed as an agenda item on the Cabinet agenda for the meeting on 27 April 2005.

### **3 The FEDS Process**

- 3.1** The first meeting of the FEDS officer steering group was held at County Hall on 29 September where a mind mapping exercise surrounding food, diet and exercise issues was undertaken. The mind-map revealed the key issues that the steering group thought FEDS should include reference to and gave participants an opportunity to prioritise all of the issues raised, on an individual basis.
- 3.2** The mind map clearly demonstrated the complex nature and the sheer scope of the task facing the group in promoting healthier lifestyle alternatives to school children. The meeting also highlighted the need for more co-ordination between programmes and between schools themselves to ensure best practice benchmarks were widespread and consistent.
- 3.3** The second meeting was held on 12 January 2005, where the analysis of the mind mapping data and further supplementary information produced a relevantly focused questionnaire for participating schools. The questionnaire was subsequently distributed to Nottinghamshire schools to allow a robust and comprehensive review of healthy eating and physical activity initiatives across the County. As well as rating national or regional programmes, schools were asked to identify locally driven initiatives in order to gain a wider perspective on school efforts to combat childhood obesity
- 3.4** It was suggested that a £100 prize voucher from County Supplies be provided from the funding for this project, as an incentive for schools to return the questionnaire and contribute to the findings from FEDS; this was acceptable to GOEM, and was also subsequently agreed at the Health Select Committee meeting of 18 January 2005. It was suggested that placing the questionnaire on the 'Wired' education website would be the most effective method of contacting schools and seeking their responses. The winner of the voucher was Arnbrook Primary School.

- 3.5** The Group received a presentation concerning possible further uses for the FEDS data. This gave the group an early indication that FEDS could be linked to priorities in the proposed new Local Public Service Agreement (PSA) for which the County Council is the lead body. If this proposal gained the support of partner organisations in Nottinghamshire further work arising from the FEDS project might receive central government financial support in return for the achievement of an agreed “stretch” target.
- 3.6** The third FEDS meeting was held at County Hall on Wednesday 23 February 2005. A presentation of the questionnaire results and an analysis of the data was given, followed by a discussion on the findings. It was agreed that further follow up work should be done to achieve the maximum return of questionnaires from schools possible. It was agreed that posting the questionnaires directly to the healthy school co-ordinators or their equivalent in each school may encourage more schools to respond.
- 3.7** The remainder of the meeting focused on possible further avenues of scrutiny around the issue of childhood obesity into which the FEDS data could feed. Discussion ensued around the increasing public perception of the issues FEDS was tackling involving TV personalities and political interest from all sides of Parliament and how to tap into this to best assist Nottinghamshire schools.
- 3.8** The fourth and final meeting of the FEDS group was held on 15 March 2005. Another presentation on the FEDS questionnaire data was given updating members of the group on further response rates and findings. The data was considered to be a useful cross section of school perceptions around healthy eating and physical activity initiatives.
- 3.9** The FEDS group discussed its recommendations and the value in continuing as a form of corporate group to monitor these issues and provide co-ordination and advice where necessary to schools and/or partner organisations. It was believed that there was some need for a corporate body and that scrutiny had a role to play in monitoring the effectiveness and participation of schools in the County.

## **4 Major Findings**

### **Current Situation**

- 4.1** 144 responses were finally received, a 39% response rate from the 366 schools contacted. This data will form the basis of the FEDS booklet which will distributed to schools and partner organisations shortly.
- 4.2** Attached is the information received from schools through the questionnaire process:
- Figures compiled from the school responses to the FEDS questionnaire in numeric format (**Appendix 1**).

- Figures compiled from the school responses to the FEDS questionnaire in graphical format (**Appendix 2**).
  - Schools' perception of the benefits of providing healthy eating and physical activity programmes (**Appendix 3**)
  - Schools' local initiatives around healthy eating and physical activity (**Appendix 4**)
  - Schools' perceptions of inadequacies and barriers they currently face in providing healthier living options for their students and their suggestions for improvement. (**Appendix 5**).
- 4.3** The FEDS group believes that further follow-up should be done with individual schools to ascertain why some programmes had been rated the way they had (be that excellent or poor). Whilst the figures themselves revealed some very interesting data there needed to be a secondary questioning of schools to better inform decision makers of the perceived inadequacies or success of a particular programme. (see recommendation 5.2)
- 4.4** The questionnaire responses clearly revealed schools' belief that there is a general inadequacy in the provision of school sports facilities. Many schools raised this as a major barrier in providing healthy living alternatives for children.
- 4.5** Some consideration should be given in the future to the provision of new school sports facilities either on a singular basis at larger site schools or as a possible joint facility for schools in close geographical proximity. In addition future planning of new schools should include the requirement of adequate physical activity facilities to promote healthier living.
- 4.6** Schools have clearly raised their concerns over this issue and future consideration should be given to alternative forms of funding be it through capital projects schemes or some form of recurrent funding to update or establish adequate physical activity facilities. (See recommendation 5.3)
- 4.7** Another issue the FEDS data raised was the problem of kitchen facilities in schools and the provision of school halls where the children can eat their meals. Aside from the cost of providing school meals there has been not been a concerted campaign to either install or update equipment at the school sites to allow them to cook and/or provide the meals to the children. Whilst it is acknowledged that UK spending levels per school meal are low compared with other European countries, the commutative issue of cooking equipment has not been adequately addressed. Recent government funding initiatives have again targeted the cost of school meals without recognising the need for some schools to be provided with the space and equipment to operate a cooking facility.
- 4.8** A number of schools within the County simply do not have the space to provide a kitchen and have inadequate or a complete lack of equipment to provide the meals. Healthy eating initiatives cannot be implemented in a

school with antiquated equipment or a lack of cooking facilities or space for the children to sit and eat the cooked meal.

- 4.9** Funding for this area should be highlighted and consideration given over the forthcoming months to other possible targeted funding sources for these items. (See recommendation 5.4)

### **Future Directions**

- 4.10** Healthy eating initiatives in schools have become an even bigger topical issue since the FEDS project began back in September 2004. The introduction of television celebrity Jamie Oliver has given school meals an even greater public profile through his media campaign and television show. Recent government initiatives have also been targeted towards healthy eating practices and increasing spending levels on school meals.
- 4.11** However the heavy emphasis on school meals and healthy eating has somewhat overshadowed the need to develop and monitor physical activity programmes to ensure that improved nutritional levels are combined with a general healthier and active lifestyle. There is some work to be done in this area to ensure that these issues are not lost within the current politically 'hot' topic of school meals.
- 4.12** Given the raised awareness of healthy eating initiatives, the FEDS group considered that a corporate group such as FEDS should continue, as a guiding body to the various organisations working in this field and as a means to scrutinise various programmes and schools uptake of these programmes to ensure the best quality service is being provided to Nottinghamshire children. The FEDS group could also be a central point of contact for partner organisations seeking a cross-sectoral body with which to deal with in relation to these healthy living ideals. (See recommendation 5.1)
- 4.13** The FEDS steering group, if approved to continue by the Committee, will meet again in the summer of 2005 and focus on its terms of reference and particularly its membership to best fit in with current structures and make a difference to new initiatives or established programmes operating in schools.
- 4.14** The Steering group considered that re-sending the FEDS questionnaire to schools in twelve (12) months time would be beneficial and provide a benchmark as to the success of healthy eating and physical activity programmes' integration into Nottinghamshire schools. Higher rates of participation in certain programmes and rising degrees of perception that the programmes provided are beneficial would be two outcomes that the FEDS group would be keen to compare and analyse in a year's time.
- 4.15** Comparing the benchmark 2005 data with a survey of schools in 2006 should provide a clear picture of successes and gaps in providing a blanket of healthier lifestyle options to the children of the County. (See recommendation 5.5)

- 4.16** The Steering group perceived that schools should be encouraged to appoint a healthy eating and physical activity “champion” whose role it would be to guide the school and interact with partner organisations concerning these issues. The champion could then be the main point of contact with the FEDS group, amongst others, and ensure that cross-fertilisation of ideas occurred between schools. Some schools have already taken up the challenge by appointing a healthy schools co-ordinator and this ideal should be promoted at every opportunity. (See recommendation 5.6)
- 4.17** The FEDS booklet (a prototype will be circulated at the meeting for comment and endorsement) which will draw together and enhance all of these points will soon be distributed to all schools and partner organisations. This benchmark data will form the basis of the future work of the FEDS group.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1** That the Committee agrees that the FEDS group continue as a scrutiny study group and that a further update of its progress be given to subsequent committee meetings, including its future role and membership.
- 5.2** That the Committee note the evidence provided from the FEDS questionnaire responses attached and agree that further follow up work should be undertaken to question individual schools about why they rated programmes in certain ways.
- 5.3** That the Committee note the problem with physical activity facilities at schools and endorse further investigation into possible future funding options for this issue, possibly through the capital works programme.
- 5.4** That the Committee note the problem with provision of equipment to schools to facilitate the provision of healthier cooked school meals and endorse the investigation into possible future funding options for this issue.
- 5.5** That the FEDS questionnaire be re-issued to schools in 12 months time to gauge take up and perceptions of healthy eating and physical activity programmes.
- 5.6** That Cabinet be asked to encourage each school to appoint a “champion” of healthy eating and physical activity, such as some schools have already done with the healthy schools co-ordinator.
- 5.7** That the committee agree to the production of the FEDS booklet to be distributed to schools and partner organisations (to be circulated at the meeting for comment).

**Lynn Senior**  
**Head of Scrutiny**

**Background Papers:**

Health Select Committee, FEDS update, 14 September 2004  
FEDS Meeting Minutes, 29 September 2004  
Health Select Committee, FEDS update, 26 October 2004  
Health Select Committee, FEDS update, 7 December 2004  
FEDS Meeting Minutes, 12 January 2005  
Health Select Committee, FEDS update, 18 January 2005  
FEDS Meeting Minutes, 23 February 2005  
Health Select Committee, FEDS update, 1 March 2005  
FEDS Meeting Minutes, 15 March 2005  
FEDS questionnaire  
FEDS mind map diagram  
Schools progress towards the healthy schools standard table  
County school menus