

UNIVERSAL INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides updated information to the Committee on the actions being undertaken to ensure the delivery of Infant Free School Meals to pupils in Nottinghamshire from September 2014 as part of the introduction of the National School Food Plan.

Information and Advice

2. The Environment and Resources Department provides a school meals service to a number of primary and secondary schools and academies across the County. 94% of primary schools and academies and 56% of secondary schools and academies buy back their catering service from the County Council.
3. The responsibility for the delivery of the National School Food Plan sits with schools. However, with NCC being the largest catering provider, the schools catering team will have a major role in supporting schools to support the implementation of the National School Food Plan.

Background

4. As reported to the Personnel Committee in January, Henry Dimpleby and John Vincent, founders of the LEON restaurant chain, were appointed by the Secretary of State for Education in 2012 to look at the issues and concerns that had been raised nationally over a number of years in respect of school food. Their findings identified that the quality of food had improved enormously since Jamie Oliver's intervention in 2005 and there was clear and measurable improvements in the nutritional quality of most food and a reduction in the sale of "junk" food. It should be noted that the nutritional standards for school meals introduced in 2010 are based around compliance with minimum and maximums allowed across 15 nutrients balanced over a 15 day (3 week) cycle.
5. The School Food Plan by Messrs Dimpleby and Vincent also concluded that the best schools incorporate food education, such as cooking, growing vegetables and even animal husbandry, into their curriculum and also

those that promote the service are able to achieve a financially viable operation.

6. The report referred to above recommends the following key actions in order to improve school meals:
 - incorporating cooking into the curriculum for Key Stages 1 to 3
 - training head teachers in food and nutrition
 - replace the existing nutritional food standards with a food based standards approach
 - Public Health England to promote policies which improve children's diets in schools
 - Ofsted inspectors to consider the way a school promotes healthy lifestyles
 - ensure small schools are fairly funded in the provision of school food
 - increase meal take up in junior and secondary schools
 - set up financially sufficient breakfast clubs
 - develop a website to share best practice
 - improve the image of school food
 - improve the skills of the school food workforce
 - introduce Universal Free School Meals to all Key Stage 1 pupils from 1 September 2014.

Nottinghamshire County Council Progress to date

Universal Free School Meals for Key Stage 1 pupils

7. As reported in January the impact of this initiative in Nottinghamshire is extremely significant. Although meal numbers served have increased over the past five years, the overall take up in primary schools is currently 45%. This includes both paid and free meal numbers measured against a total on roll figure. Based on an estimated 85% take-up by pupils in Key Stage 1, this will result in an additional 10,000 to 12,000 extra meals per day which equates to an overall take up of 75% in primary schools after the introduction of Universal Free School Meals.
8. Assessment consultations have now taken place with schools and the common concerns raised were lack of available dining space, adequacy of equipment. A number of these are able to be addressed by operating a two sitting approach, introduction of family service arrangements ahead of any additional expenditure. .
9. Nottinghamshire's capital funding allowance is £1.7m; and is available to support the additional infrastructure requirements and excludes funding available separately for voluntary aided and academy schools. First year revenue funding allocations have been announced by the Government at £2.30 a meal, representing the national average cost of

providing a school meal. This allowance is expected to cover the average school meal prices as well as incidental expenditure such as cutlery, seating and other associated costs.

10. Approval via the Schools Capital Refurbishment Planning Board was given to prioritise expenditure on the basis of having the greatest impact on the greatest number of pupils. Following this assessment together with operational information collated from schools over 100 projects have been identified based on existing kitchen capacity and projected increase in meal numbers. It soon became clear that based on the state of a number of kitchens that the capital allocation would be approximately 50% of the actual requirement. Maintained schools with a self-managed service were contacted to request information on their potential requirement. Of the 100 projects identified at time of writing, 40 have now been completed with orders placed and work underway for a further 45. The remainder will be carried out over the next few months. The principle of delivering a service from self-sufficient individual kitchens is the long term financially and customer preferred option, this will not be achievable in all schools within the timescale requirements; however alternative arrangements will be in place including the transporting of meals from other kitchens
12. All light equipment crockery, cutlery, cooking utensils etc. have been placed with delivery expected over the next 6 weeks.
13. Additional staffing requirements have been identified at 120 part time posts. Adverts were placed and with the excellent support of the Business Support Centre team we were able to proceed with a speedy recruitment process. There may of course be applicants who withdraw from the process for a variety of reasons between now and the September start and we are working with schools to assist in local recruitment
14. Planning in conjunction with suppliers for extra food deliveries for those schools with insufficient food storage capacity is taking place as an attempt to firm up expected meal numbers to allow orders to be placed ahead of the summer break
15. By now all schools should be in receipt of a letter from the schools catering team identifying our current position and emphasising the importance of ensuring parents continue to register for free meals if they are entitled. This will ensure the school is in receipt of the schools premium. A further letter has been sent by the Free Schools Team all correspondence has now been added to Wired. Leaflets have also been sent for schools to distribute to pupils and a request to ascertain the likely take-up from parents to assist with September Planning. In addition to the letter a checklist has been provided for schools for their completion to assist in their planning, attached as Appendix 1. It has been encouraging that a number of "test trial" days have been set over

the remainder of the summer term which will certainly assist in identifying further issues.

Conclusion

16. Delivering the National School Food Plan represents a significant and unprecedented challenge to the schools catering service. Of particular significance has been the speed of introduction. Whilst we shall endeavour to have all in place for the 1st September we have also set-up contingency arrangements with a number of schools strategically placed across the County to provide a back-up. Providing the extra meals on a site by site basis clearly represents a challenge to school chefs however as is mostly the case, staff continue with the schools and the service to respond to this challenge and ensure every entitled pupil will be served a meal.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the information on the recent development and introduction of the National School Food Plan and the actions required to deliver the Plan in Nottinghamshire be noted

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