

REPORT OF GROUP MANAGER CATERING & FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

SCHOOL MEALS SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform and update the Personnel Committee of the current position of the school meals service in Nottinghamshire.

Introduction

2. The School Meals Service is delivered in a variety of ways across the County. With delegated budgets to a school / academy level, the choice of provider is made by individual head teachers and governing bodies. This provides schools with the choice of buying a service from the authority, procuring a private contractor or managing the service in-house. Appendix 1 provides the service market share in 2009 and the current position. The service is predominantly provided by NCC Catering Service with a marginal trend shift to self-management in the last few years. The 95% of primary & special schools supplied by the authority are maintained by a group buy-back arrangement i.e. all delegated monies are returned to the service along with the responsibility of delivering the service within the available budget allocation. Self-managed schools, secondaries and academies have full catering budget delegation. Where the service is provided by the authority this is on a full cost recovery and commercially run basis with any end of year surpluses being returned to the school. The authority also provides a chargeable advisory and audit service for self-managed or contracted out catering services.

Statutory Responsibilities & Meal Prices

3. A statutory responsibility exists for governing bodies to supply a meal to pupils in receipt of free meals together with a suitable environment for pupils to consume food brought from home. It is not a statutory requirement to provide a paid hot meal service however with the exception of one recent Academy all schools in Nottinghamshire do. Meal prices are set by individual schools with the exception of primary and specials who buy-back into the group supplied service which is determined on annual basis. This is currently £2 for a two course meal and has been since the Autumn Term of 2010 and is likely to remain at this level for the financial year 2012/13. If a hot meal is provided then this has to comply with a set of 14 nutritional components averaged over a 15 day cycle menu. Statutory

responsibilities also exist in meeting the Food Safety Act, Health and Safety and other regulations concerning equipment, chemicals and premises.

Other catering services in schools

4. **Milk** is supplied free to all pupils under 5 and to pupils in receipt of free meals aged between 5 & 7. Paid for milk is also available in all primary and special schools for pupils aged 5-11 (11-18 in special schools). The government subsidised paid milk price is currently £12 per term (approx 18p per day) and delivered and managed via an outsourced arrangement with CoolMilk. The full cost of Under 5's milk is recovered from the government's nursery milk unit. The free milk to 5-7 year olds in receipt of free meals approximately £80k per year is funded indirectly by schools.
5. **Additional services** are provided for breakfast, mid-morning breaks, after school clubs, cookery clubs, teacher training days and other community events.

N.C.C Service provided 2011/12 Outcomes

6. **Financial** – Targets set for the year included maintaining the meal selling price for Primary & Special Schools at £2.00 per meal and eliminating the requirement for a Council Subsidy introduced in the 2009/10 financial year to cover the additional pay costs. There was also a target set for a financial return of £246k to Secondary Schools. These targets were met with a return to schools of £350k and an overall surplus of £422k and recovery of NJE costs through efficiencies and savings. This was achieved by targeting to individual schools, controlling costs, an increase in meals sales and a 30% reduction in management costs. The selling price has remained the same since the Autumn Term 2010. Some of this year's generated surplus will be invested into service development and improvement in school kitchens and dining rooms.
7. **Meal Sales – Appendix 2** Shows a 3 year trend on performance in relation to overall take-up of free meals in primary and secondary schools against entitlements and the overall meal take-up performance. It should be noted that pupils are encouraged to register their entitlement even if they don't necessarily wish to have a meal. Emphasis is placed by the service on ensuring pupils who are registered do have a meal. These percentages generally mirror both the East Midlands and National trends which are averaged at 80% in primary schools and 69% in secondary schools.

Overall meal sales in both primary and secondary schools have shown a significant increase in 2011/12 recognising the targeted approach to addressing locally based issues and helped by the selling price freeze. Take-up performance for self managed and private contractor provision for this year is not yet available.

- 8. Customer Satisfaction** – In November 2011 a survey was undertaken to every pupil in primary and special schools with the catering service managed by the authority. The purpose being to ascertain what pupils and parents thought of the service and if they didn't have a meal what were the main reasons. From the 53,000 surveys that were sent out responses were received on behalf of 10,000 pupils. Completed copies were returned, an 18% response rate should be regarded as extremely high as the average response rate for direct mail is typically 3%. 75% of the responses came from parents/children who currently have school meals and 25% from those who don't. Results from the existing service users was extremely positive with 93% rating every element at least average and above and 65% rating all elements as above average.

Service from the catering staff was the best rated with over 80% rating the service as 'good' or 'very good', 'value for money' received 74% rating the service as 'good' or 'very good'. Also rated as 'good' or 'very good' was the food itself, again scoring highly with, overall taste (75%), quality of ingredients (73%), variety of food (78%), and presentation of food (65%).

On surveying parents whose children currently don't have school meals, the main reason given was 68% saying because their 'child has a cooked meal at night', after this the main reason was 38% stating 'cost'.

Overall conclusion from the results are extremely positive in regard to the actual business and service delivery, with existing service users rating all elements of the service highly. The detailed responses have provided a better insight into where improvements can be made or where their consistent concerns/issues at specific schools. These are being reviewed and analysed by the service to determine how they can work best with the schools to make these improvements.

- 9. Food Procurement and local supply** – Frozen and grocery goods are supplied by a national contract which is procured in conjunction with other service areas across the County and the City thereby maximising the values. For the last four years the service has been actively engaged with the local supply food chain both at farmer and wholesaler level. This process has been substantially enhanced by the re-introduction of fresh meat into schools from a 15 year period of using frozen. Over 70 % by volume of food on the plate is now sourced from Nottinghamshire or the East Midlands and represents a value of £1.25m. The Authority has the Silver accreditation under the Food for Life programme, which ensures that no undesirable food additives or hydrogenated fats, meat supplied is from farms which meet UK welfare standards, 75% of dishes served are freshly prepared, that menus are seasonal and other food related criteria.
- 10. Healthy Eating** - Supporting this agenda remains a high priority for the Authority. The linkages between food consumed, longer term health and academic achievements have been proven by various studies in recent years. For the last 8 years the service has been running a variety of healthy eating

initiatives. These include running cookery clubs for pupils and parents, visits to farms, menu planning days, recipe testing and supporting school council forums. Additionally there is a requirement for meals served to meet a standard of 14 minimum and maximum nutrients.

Scrutiny Review

11. A joint member scrutiny review was conducted in 2009 with an emphasis on increasing the take-up of school meals. The main recommendations were the introduction of an electronic payment method for school meals, combining all school food associated services within one department, removing plastic meal trays, reduced meal prices or provide free meals for all Key Stage 1 Children and examine in detail services in schools with less than a 35% take-up (below County average). With the exception of reducing meal prices or providing free meals for all key stage 1 pupils, the others have either been implemented or due to their nature continue to require ongoing implementation. For example by the summer of 2012 it is anticipated that 30% of schools will have an online payment system. Changes to lunchtime arrangements are conducted in conjunction with schools and an increasing number are moving away from a counter type service to the more traditional family service style bringing with it a less rushed approach to the lunchtime experience. The combining of the work carried out across two departments has resulted in a financial saving of £200k per year and has had little impact on schools who continue to require some support, which is provided, where they are providing the service themselves.

The future

12. Support for a hot meal service by schools and parents in Nottinghamshire remains extremely positive. Services bought by schools and academies will continue to be closely examined to ensure that it is providing value for money and more importantly delivering the quality of service they require. Investment is being made into a quality management system that will provide a closer inspection, standards maintenance and improvement approach. The financial support from the government of £610k in the form of the schools lunch grant is helping to ensure the viability of the school meals service as well as maintaining the quality of food being served without the need to increase the selling price. Changes are expected shortly concerning the outcome of a review of free meal eligibility under Universal Credit System being introduced in 2013. It is anticipated that a report will be brought to this committee when the impacts are known.

Other Options Considered

6. Report for information.

Statutory and Policy Implications

7. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION

8. That this report is noted.

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Background Papers

Scrutiny Report.

May 2011 School Meals Survey Results

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Nottinghamshire

Market Share Breakdown 2009

	Primary	Special	Secondary	Total	%
	No of Schools				
NCC (Communities)	270	8	33	311	91.5
Private Sector	0	2	3	5	1.5
Self managed	12	1	11	24	7.0
Total	282	11	47	340	100

Market Share Breakdown 2012

	Primary	Special	Secondary	Academies	Total	%
	No of Schools					
NCC (E&R)	265	8	17	16	306	90.2
Private Sector	0	0	2	1	3	1
Self managed	12	3	5	10	30	8.8
Total	277	11	24	27	339	100
<i>Self-managed supplied support</i>	8	1	3	3	15	50



