

UNIVERSAL INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides updated information to the Forum 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. A number of schools and academies have chosen to either manage the catering services directly themselves (27) or procure an arrangement with a private sector catering provider (5).
4. 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

5. Henry Dimbleby 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.
6. The School Food Plan by Messrs Dimbleby 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.

7. 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

8. 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.
9. Assessment consultations have now taken place with schools and the common concerns raised are lack of available dining space, adequacy of equipment, increased costs of lunchtime supervision, extra furniture requirements and possible changes to school timetables to allow for two sittings.
10. Nottinghamshire's capital funding allowance is £1.7m; this 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.
11. 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. Whilst a principle of delivering a service from self-sufficient individual kitchens is the long term financially and customer preferred option, this will not be achievable within the timescale requirements of service delivery i.e. 1 September 2014. Therefore alternative arrangements are required to be in place including delivering either prepared whole or part meals to some schools on a daily basis.

12. Of the 100 projects identified at time of writing 10 have been completed with orders placed and work underway for a further 25. The remainder will be carried out over the next three months however it should be noted that sub-contractors involved are exceptionally busy with demands across the region.
13. All light equipment orders, crockery, cutlery, cooking utensils have been placed with delivery expected over the next 6 weeks.
14. Additional staffing requirements have been identified at 150. Adverts have been placed with recruitment underway with approximately 100+ expressions of interest received so far Efforts are also being made locally to fill these posts together with a request being made to recruit on a permanent basis. It was hoped to arrange large staff training induction events hence the requirement to recruit staff as soon as possible
15. Contact has been made with suppliers and extra deliveries for schools with insufficient food storage capacity are being arranged, again there is extreme pressure on the national food distributors to deal with the increased capacity
16. 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 was provided for schools to assist in their planning for September, attached as Appendix 1. Schools should by now also have received a leaflet for parents for their distribution Appendix 2
17. A Regional Roadshow event promoted by the Children's Food Trust was held on the 5th June at the Notts County Football Ground aimed at Head Teachers, school chefs, caterers and business managers to providing further information on supporting the initiative.

Conclusion

18. 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 the challenge and ensure every 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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