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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

School Catering Management Information Update

Education, Children and Families Committee

15 November 2011

1   Purpose of report

1.1   This report provides an update on the current position of the school catering service.

2   Main report

Promotion of School Meals

2.1   We continue to promote school meals to ensure uptake in every school is maximised.

2.2   To promote the school meals service and provide a forum to disseminate information, the school meals/food in schools website was created and is regularly updated providing information on school meals with links to the legislation and other relevant information on food in schools; it can be found at www.edinburgh.gov.uk/schoolmeals.

2.3   The dedicated 'food in schools' e-mail address continues to provide a forum through which parents, pupils and school staff can provide feedback on any aspect of food in schools. Feedback is noted and responded to where possible; from feedback received we are developing the following:

- To make school meals more accessible and eliminate the difficulties some parents and pupils have identified as discouraging them from using the school meals service we are currently investigating the possibility of an online payment facility as part of a wider initiative for online payments for other school based services.

- Feedback has also shown that more seasonal menus would be appreciated. As a result of this feedback we introduced new menus after the Easter break. We now have a spring/summer menu which runs from Easter to the October break and an autumn/ winter menu which runs from the October break to Easter. This allows greater flexibility in the menu and minimises food wastage by providing more seasonal menus. Items such as soup feature more in the winter menu as they are popular choices in these months but not so popular in the summer. Feedback from this change has been positive and we hope to develop these menus further.

2.5   In order to reach a wider audience through social media and to inform the public about services and also answer queries, the Council ran two twitter exercises during

September where tweets were sent out to promote 'what we do'. The school meals service participated to raise the profile of school meals and the service provided.

2.6   Regular operational meetings have been established with each of the three catering providers to facilitate an improved sharing and exchange of information and facilitate greater partnership working. A joint meeting between Children and Families and all three catering providers has allowed the sharing of best practice, development of joint initiatives/training opportunities and ensures consistency of standards and service delivery.

2.7   Secondary school pupils continue to be a difficult market to capture as they have the option to leave school premises at lunch time. All three of our catering providers continue to work hard in order to increase uptake. A range of initiatives have been implemented in recent months or are in the planning stages in order to attract and retain secondary pupils, by one or more of the providers.

2.8   As detailed in a previous report, 'Pasta King' was rolled out in all schools serviced by Edinburgh Catering Services. This product continues to be popular with pupils however the initial peak in uptake has reached a plateau. This demonstrates that, while these products are popular, they must be refreshed and added to on a regular basis in order to maintain interest in the service and encourage pupils to remain in school at lunch time. In order to maintain this interest, catering providers are currently researching similar hand-held 'take away' options which are popular with secondary pupils and have implemented some new products such as Spice Connections (a new range of 'world' sauces for use with rice or noodles) and Sub Central, a new Sub roll concept where the pupil selects their own hot or cold filling, sauce and salad.

2.9   The 'Eatz4u' school meals initiative, in conjunction with Unilever, continues to be developed and rolled out in secondary schools.

2.10   Theme menus have been introduced in schools in order to provide variety to the menu and introduce pupils to new foods. These have proved popular and a program for each term is provided. Further theme days will be developed in conjunction with schools and in response to feedback from pupils.

2.11   In response to requests the introduction of a breakfast service is currently being rolled out in some Secondary schools. This service will provide healthy choices and promote the consumption of breakfast which research shows to have a positive effect on behaviour and learning.

2.12   A pre-order grab and go system is currently being trialled in a number of secondary schools and a scoping exercise is currently underway to explore an extension of this initiative and also the introduction of salad bars. The potential for these initiatives has been identified by both the catering providers and the schools as they would encourage healthier choices and reduce queuing times at lunch.

Future Initiatives

2.13   We will continue to improve the exchange of information through effective partnership working with schools, parents and pupils in order to promote all new initiatives. This will include the development of a newsletter to inform pupils and school staff of initiatives and changes within the service and to include healthy eating information.

2.14   We will continue to support and involve schools in this process to ensure they are fully supportive of the school meals service and integrate it with the curriculum where possible. For example:

- Several schools have had theme menus correlating to the curriculum and topics covered in school e.g. an African menu was tied into learning and teaching about their twinned school resulting in positive feedback from pupils and school staff.

- A menu design competition has taken place in a number of primary schools. Pupils designed their own menus and the most popular choice was served for lunch on a chosen day. Two schools were able to link this with health week.

- An initiative called 'On your marks, get set, cook' was run in three secondary schools. This program aims to encourage pupils to make healthy choices when cooking and eating. As well as providing input into home economics classes, one of the schools also participated in a cooking challenge organised by the catering provider. Two teams of pupils with one member of school staff had to prepare a meal from pre-selected ingredients and the audience voted for the winning team. This initiative was very well supported and enjoyed by the school and further events are being planned for the future in other schools.

2.15   We will ensure that schools and pupils continue to have an input into service provision and the products on offer to ensure they are those which will attract more pupils to the dining room. Feedback from school staff and pupils is continually gathered to ascertain which menu options are popular and those which are less so. This feedback is used during menu planning for the next session. Examples include tasting sessions where some schools have participated in tasting sessions in order to select a product for inclusion on the menu which is most popular with pupils e.g. pizza tasting, soup tasting and salmon products. 'Chef's specials' have also been popular in a number of secondary schools therefore these will be extended and developed into next session.

2.16   We will target and consult with schools showing a low uptake in order to identify ways in which to promote and improve the school meals service.

- We continue to identify and promote examples of best practice in terms of effective management of the dining environment and dining experience.

- There is a continuing program of improvements to dining areas including the provision of new dining tables and seating in order to maximise space and the number of pupils able to be seated.

- We continue to examine the service in schools and implement changes where appropriate to enhance the dining experience and promote independence for the pupils e.g. queue management, self-service of certain items and clear-up areas.

- In June 2011 in a number of schools we trialled an initiative to ensure new One Cards were registered and in place for P7 visits to secondary schools to promote the use of the school lunch service. Promotions such as meal deals were offered to P7 pupils during their visit to secondary school to encourage the use of school catering facilities. A review of this initiative is being carried out in order to identify examples of good practice and areas where the process can be improved.

2.17   We will continue to work in partnership with schools to reduce food waste. This could be achieved by extending effective meal ordering systems which are operated in some schools to other schools.

School Meals Uptake Data

2.18 An exercise was undertaken to assimilate and analyse the latest available data on overall school meals uptake throughout the City; the results are included in Appendix 1. In excess of 2 million school meals are delivered in Edinburgh each year.

2.19 The overall uptake of school meals for the 2010/11 academic year has decreased marginally to 25.6% compared with 25.9% for 2009/10 however this reduction is entirely attributable to the number of days which were lost through school closures as a result of the bad weather during last winter. The underlying trend in secondary school uptake actually shows an encouraging, albeit slight, improvement.

2.20 The 2011 Annual National School Meals Census was undertaken on Tuesday, 22 February 2011. The data is included in Appendix 1 together with a comparison with previous years. It should be noted that the annual census is a snap-shot taken on a single day each year and, as such, is not necessarily representative of the true underlying position.

Free School Meals

2.21 With effect from 3 August 2009 the entitlement to free school meals was extended to children from families where the parents or carers are in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit with an income below the threshold for receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit.

2.22 The number of pupils entitled and registered for free school meals as at 22 February 2011 (the 2011 Census date) compared to that in 2010 is shown in the following table.

	Number of pupils as at 23/02/2010	Percentage of school roll	Number of pupils at 21/02/2011	Percentage of school roll
Primary	4,684	19.1%	5,391	21.8%
Secondary	2,292	12.4%	2,865	15.6%

2.23 As can be seen from the data above, both the number and percentage of pupils entitled to and registered for school meals has increased in both sectors.

2.24 Although entitlement to free school meals is well publicised, not all pupils who are eligible for free school meals register to receive that entitlement. Similarly, not all children registered to receive free school meals actually take them. The Annual School Meals Census is the only opportunity to receive comprehensive data regarding this area. The position at the last Census date of 22 February 2011 was as follows:

	Pupils entitled and registered for free meals	Registered pupils present on Census day	Pupils present and taking free meals
Primary	5,391	4,490	4,083
Secondary	2,865	2,022	1,196

2.25 In view of the very difficult financial issues facing Local Authorities; in return for Councils agreement to a specific and enhanced commitment to reduce class sizes, in 2009 the Scottish Government proposed that the commitment to the further expansion of free school meals will be that "Councils will provide a nutritious free meal to all children in primaries P1-P3 in those schools that are in the 20% most deprived communities in a Council area".

2.26 The existing legislation governing free school meals based on directing entitlement to the needs of specific families is considered to be the most appropriate targeting scheme to be applied in determining the achievement of the 20% target rather than a wider definition based on a community area.

2.27 As at 1 November 2011 there were 11,434 pupils in primaries P1-P3 in Edinburgh of which 1,710 were registered as entitled to receive FSM which equates to 14.96%. This represents a very significant variance from February 2011 (the last point at which this data was collated) when the percentage was 20.42%. The reasons for this are being investigated. There will still be pupils who would be eligible but for some reason have not submitted an application. We continue to publicise entitlement to FSM provision and receive applications for FSM on an ongoing basis.

2.28 In addition to the provision of FSM, we also operate nearly 30 breakfast clubs in a variety of primary schools throughout the City, many in the more deprived areas. At these clubs children benefit from a free nutritious breakfast. These are generally very well attended; although detailed attendance records are not maintained we fully expect that a significant number of children in primaries P1-P3 will benefit from these clubs including those who do not also benefit from a FSM. This additional provision is expected to bring the overall uptake up to the 20% target.

3   Equalities Impact

3.1 There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.

4   Financial Implications

4.1 The Act places a duty on education authorities to promote school lunches and, in particular, free school lunches. It is also in the interests of the meals suppliers to increase the uptake of meals in order to maximise income. At the same time, however, it should be noted that any increase in the uptake of school meals will come at an increased cost to the Children & Families Department and, in turn, the Council.

4.2 Providing a free school meal costs £2.62 for a primary school pupil and £3.08 for a secondary school pupil. For standard meals, the subsidy (i.e. the difference between the cost to the Department and the price payable by the pupil) for each meal is £0.87 for a primary school pupil and £0.83 for a secondary school pupil. The level of subsidy has increased due to the fact that, although inflationary increases have been applied to the cost of school meal provision in February 2011 for the second year in succession Council chose to apply no increase in the price of school meals.

4.3 It remains likely that additional resources will be required in the future if the school meals service is to be sustained and developed in the way that is required. The impact on costs of any further increase school meals uptake will be kept under close review.

4.4 The school catering services provided by Edinburgh Catering Services have been included in the scope for the IfM area within the Alternative Business Models Programme with the expectation that increased uptake can be achieved whilst generating service efficiencies to mitigate the associated potential cost impact.

5 Environmental Impact

5.1 There is no environmental impact arising from this report.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

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Appendices	1. School Meal Uptake Data
Contact/tel/Email	Billy MacIntyre/ 469 3366/ billy.macintyre@edinburgh.gov.uk
Wards affected	All
Single Outcome Agreement	Not applicable
Background Papers	School Catering Update - Education, Children & Families Committee 7 October 2010

School Meals Uptake Data

1   Overall Uptake of School Meals

1.1   An exercise has been undertaken to assimilate and analyse all available data on overall
       school meals uptake throughout the entire City. The results, showing uptake by
       academic year, are detailed in the table below.

	2008/09	**2009/10**	**2010/11**
Nurseries	64.2%	60.3%	62.2%
Primary Schools	31.0%	32.9%	32.5%
Secondary Schools	13.6%	14.9%	14.9%
Special Schools	62.7%	68.8%	64.3%

Number of meals delivered	2,073,354	2,173,295	2,122,288
School roll	44,896	44,427	44,498
Overall uptake percentage	24.3%	25.9%	25.6%

1.2   Whilst this data is considered sufficiently robust to show overall trends, it is not an entirely
       accurate representation of the uptake position and should be treated with caution - the
       following points should, in particular, be noted:

       • the data regarding the number of meals taken comes from monthly returns received
         from each school and the level of accuracy is dependent on the degree of rigor
         applied by each school in completion;

       • the level of uptake is calculated as a percentage of the school roll at the start of the
         academic year and not based on actual attendance. This will understate the uptake
         percentage shown above as absences will not be taken into consideration.

1.3   The uptake levels for 2010/11 are generally consistent with that achieved in 2009/10.
       The uptake in primary schools showed a small reduction of 0.4% however this is entirely
       attributable to the unprecedented number of days during which schools were closed due
       to bad weather during the last winter. There was a lesser impact on secondary school
       uptake as the number of closures was not as significant however the fact that, despite the
       closures, uptake levels were identical to 2009/10 masks a marginal underlying
       improvement in secondary school uptake which is encouraging.

1.4   Although, as explained above, the data used has its obvious limitations it is currently the
       only means at our disposal to allow a consistent perspective across the entire estate to
       be measured and reported.

2   Annual School Meals Census Data

2.1   A National School Meals Census is undertaken on one day early in each calendar year for both primary and secondary schools with the results showing comparative data across all Scottish Local Authorities being published towards the middle of that year.

2.2   The most recent published census was undertaken on 22 February 2011. The data for Edinburgh together with a comparison against the data from previous years is detailed in the table below.

	24/02/2009 Census	23/02/2010 Census	22/02/2011 Census
Primary Schools	38.9%	40.5%	40.4%
Secondary Schools	23.0%	19.3%	18.8%

2.3   Although data is collected as part of the census exercise relating to Special Schools, this is not published nationally; no data is collected regarding nursery school provision.

2.4   The percentage uptake figures on the census day are significantly higher than those shown for overall uptake based on the returns from schools. A small proportion of the difference will be due to the overall uptake figures being based on the school roll and not on actual attendance. However, the main reason for the significant difference is the fact that schools in Edinburgh work to a 4.5 day academic week resulting in a significant reduction in school meals uptake on a Friday. The meals uptake on a Friday can be less than 50% of that achieved during the rest of the week with the majority of these being free school meals; the impact is greatest in the Secondary Schools.

2.5   By way of illustration this is why secondary school uptake on 22 February 2011 was 18.8% compared with an annual overall average uptake for 2010/11 of 14.9% (within which the uptake in February 2010 was 15.1%).

2.6   Uptake for both Primary and Secondary Schools shows a slight decrease compared with the census results from February 2010. There are no obvious discernible reasons which have been identified to explain these variances and this is not a trend which is reflected in our own uptake data which looks at the position across the entire academic year rather than on a single day.