

Education, Children and Families Committee

10am, Tuesday, 22 May 2018

Edinburgh Catering Services – Update on Schools Meals and the Use of Plastic in Schools

Item number	7.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	City wide
Council Commitments	26; 45

Executive Summary

This report addresses an addendum approved by the Education, Children and Families Committee, on 13 December 2017, by providing an update on the school meals service; progress on Food for Life Silver; transporting school meals; reducing plastics and packaging throughout the estate; and menu feedback opportunities.

Edinburgh Catering Services – Update on Schools Meals and the Use of Plastic in Schools

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Committee:
 - 1.1.1 Notes the content of this report.
 - 1.1.2 Notes the continued successful retention of Food for Life (FFL) Bronze catering mark across the school estate, Silver catering mark in two school and the intention to increase the Silver accreditation to a further two schools;
 - 1.1.3 Notes the current challenges with regards to school meal transport and the intention to incrementally open more production kitchens;
 - 1.1.4 Notes the current actions being taken to reduce the use of plastics across the catering service; and
 - 1.1.5 Notes the options available for feedback on school menu design.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 13 December 2017, the Education, Children and Families Committee considered an annual report providing an update on school meals, which highlighted a number of emerging challenges principally due to school meal uptake continuing to increase.
- 2.2 An addendum by the Green Group was approved that stated “in light of the challenges laid out in this report, this Committee calls for a further report in two cycles setting out the recommendations to tackle these challenges, including, but not restricted to:
 - extending the number of schools reaching Food for Life silver accreditation; the impact caused by transport and time delays on the nutritional value of menu items;
 - options to further reduce packaging;
 - a mechanism for parents to input thoughts into the menu design, with a focus on healthy options. and
 - further, the report should consider how other authorities have been dealing with similar challenges.”

- 2.3 In addition to the above, the Transport and Environment Committee, on 9 March 2018, approved an addendum by the Green Group part of which “noted that plastic bottles are used during Edinburgh Council service delivery, including school pack lunches, and requests a report on way of reducing the use.”
- 2.4 This report seeks to address the above addendums.

3. Main report

Extending Food for Life Silver

- 3.1 The two silver pilot sites (Currie HS and Buckstone PS) have implemented silver catering mark menus over a full year and two menu cycles, 2016/17 and 2017/18. To achieve the Silver Catering Mark catering must:
- continue to meet ALL the bronze standards (assurance certificates required for all meat, along with supplier declarations; other standards to be assessed during inspection);
 - pick up an additional 150 points in total by:
 - 1) Spending at least 5% of total ingredient budget on organic produce. Min: 25 points (this is required)
 - 2) Sourcing ethical and environmentally friendly food (organic, free range, MSC, MCS ‘fish to eat’, Freedom Food, Fairtrade or LEAF). Min: 15 points;
 - acting on the making healthy eating easy steps. Min: 20 points; and
 - collect another 90 points from any of the three categories (including; reducing plate waste, meat free day, % local spend).
- 3.2 Achieving a minimum of 150 points in the pilot schools has been reached through a combination of several activities, which include making healthy choices easier and direct work with the schools to promote the school meals service and wider aspects of food through education.
- 3.3 To reach the required 5% of total ingredient budget on organic produce, several products have been tried with varying success. Organic produce is often significantly more expensive than the non-organic alternative. To minimise the impact of this, the service has researched several different products and options; selecting some with a smaller price differential where possible. The full analysis was provided in the report to Committee on 13 December 2017.
- 3.4 Moving forward, the service will continue to work with Food for Life (FFL) to build upon the Bronze catering mark. By maintaining the Bronze catering mark across all schools, work will continue with suppliers to source produce from Scotland and the UK where possible; such as meat, chicken, dairy, fruit and vegetables with the principal aim to increase the range of local produce available.

- 3.5 The service has recently signed up to the Meat Free Monday campaign – the first local authority in Scotland to do so. It is hoped that this will further promote our commitment to work with FFL on one of their core aims of achieving greater uptake of fruit and vegetables in children’s diets.
- 3.6 The cost of moving to Silver across the estate is a significant hurdle as the likely increase is in the region of £200k per annum to the current budget. However, the service has been working with FFL to conduct independent analysis on the true total cost of moving to silver and this will be shared with members prior to the FY 2019/20 budget setting exercise.
- 3.7 Notwithstanding the above, it is proposed to seek to move to Silver catering mark in two further establishments, St Crispin’s Special School and Nether Currie Primary. This can be achieved at minimal cost by changing production kitchens, i.e., St Crispin’s SS will supply Buckstone PS and Currie HS will supply Nether Currie PS, which will allow both to be accredited.
- 3.8 The local authority holders of Silver Food for Life award in Scotland are Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and Stirling. While these authorities who are working to less volumes than Edinburgh, the programme has received the investment needed to achieve the accreditation.

The impact caused by transport and time delays on the nutritional value of menu items

- 3.9 The catering service principal objective is to deliver high quality, hot food to the 90+ schools under their responsibility, which is typically 18,500 meals per day Monday to Thursday. Data from the Healthy Living Survey 2017, highlights that Edinburgh provides the fourth highest number of meals across Scotland behind Glasgow, Fife and North Lanarkshire. The service is delivered from 54 production kitchens across the school sites and therefore kitchen staff play a significant role in preparing and transporting hot and cold food to the other 41 primary schools and 18 nurseries, which don’t have cooking facilities.
- 3.10 The production kitchens use Reiber boxes to keep the food at a safe temperature during transport and leave the cooking of meals as late as possible, to ensure the food is as fresh as it can possibly be. The Catering management team have worked to minimise transport runs to ensure food is not being held too long and all kitchen staff receive training on the use of transport boxes to include packing techniques. Over time, advice from Reiber has been adapted on transporting meals to ensure that kitchens fill boxes correctly so that food is kept at the correct temperature and specific serving methods are adopted to enhance food quality and nutrition. In summary, the key to keeping the food as fresh as possible, is the production kitchen cooks adapting cooking techniques to ensure meals are as fresh and as high quality as possible taking into account transportation requirements. This approach changes on a daily basis depending on the menu for any given day, e.g., the requirements for transporting breaded or coated fish is different to soup or stews.

3.11 The main challenges around this method of delivery are;

- Transport runs are often combined so the drivers' complete multi-drops. This minimises the number of vehicles being used and is less costly than using 2 or 3 delivery drivers. However, in theory, this impacts on meal quality due to the transport time of multi-drops and meals being prepared early to accommodate transport time.
- School kitchen facilities – many of the current production kitchens have been adapted to accommodate transporting meals. Much of the equipment is dated and is only capable of producing a set number of meals. In some kitchens, this results in food being cooked in batches and being held longer prior to transporting.
- Rising Roles across the estate have led to many kitchens transporting circa 300 meals to primary schools. This has increased the amount of vans the service have had to contract to deliver the meals. This is set to increase over the Summer term 18/19 with an additional 21 Early Years settings launching a meal service to accommodate 1140.

3.12 A number of production kitchens were closed several years ago as part of a budget saving exercise and, in many of these schools, the former space has since been adopted into school usage areas. However, to seek to address the above challenges, the service is carrying out a feasibility study into opening more production kitchens across the estate. Initially, it is proposed to establish production kitchens at Ratho and Queensferry Primary Schools, which can be achieved with limited investment due to their former kitchens still being in situ. A positive impact of this is that there will be a reduction in 4 school meal runs daily to and from the schools. Both kitchens will be well equipped to deal with the rising roles specifically in these outlying areas and contribute to the support of the 1140 nursery meals programme. Due to the forecast demand through rising school rolls, it is likely that additional production kitchens will have to be opened in the future.

3.13 Most other Scottish local authorities transport meals to some extent. For many smaller local authorities, the benefits of transporting meals reduce the labour cost to provide the service and are effective in remote areas. From discussions with other authorities it is understood that Edinburgh has one of the largest transport runs across Scotland. Many authorities tie in similar menus to Edinburgh to mitigate the challenges of transporting meals. The menus are designed with transport in mind, looking at recipes which will hold well in Reiber boxes and products that are modified to allow for transport.

Packaging and Plastic Bottles

3.14 The catering service currently procures plastic water bottles across the estate for the provision of packed lunches. Monday to Thursday the service use, re-useable beakers with jugs of water on dining tables. However, due to the nature of the

service on a Friday, it is not feasible to offer this option as pupils take the packed lunch before leaving for the day.

3.15 The packed lunch currently contains: a sandwich, piece of fruit, fruit yogurt and a bottle of water. Many children take this packed lunch to eat at activity clubs or after school clubs and the provision of water is important for hydration. However, increasingly parents are providing their children with re-useable water bottles removing the need to provide a further disposal option.

3.16 The service has been working closely with suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging in the supply chain. The environmental performance of suppliers is benchmarked during the Excel Tender Framework, with suppliers detailing the steps they take to mitigate the impact on the environment. Suppliers are encouraged to minimise the amount of packaging used on incoming goods, while bearing in mind the food hygiene requirements for the protection of foodstuffs. Work with all our suppliers on initiatives to reduce packaging waste includes: -

- Brakes (dry & frozen) - have a stringent Environmental Management System policy which details their approach to product packaging and the steps they are taking to reduce product packaging and plastics.
https://www.brake.co.uk/media/1968/working-with-us-2016_may1.pdf
- Muller Wiseman (milk supplier) are currently working with Tetra Pak to test non-plastic straws or a campaign on correct recycling of cartons.
- George Andersons (vegetables) where possible utilise reusable crates to deliver fruit and vegetables
- The department have been in contact with zero waste Scotland who have produce a toolkit for kitchens to help them reduce waste -
http://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/FoodWaste_CateringTeam_Toolkit10%204_0.pdf
- From information provided by Scotland Excel (procurement partner for
- Scottish local authorities) many other councils are actively looking into reducing packaging waste. Many councils face similar challenges in removing plastic water bottles and removing plastic straws from milk cartons. Scotland Excel have been actively working with suppliers to review their products and push through new initiatives such as milk straw recycling campaigns and a new non-plastic water product.

3.17 With specific reference to the Friday packed lunch, the service are currently proposing to implement:-

- Leaving the water bottle out of the packed lunch bag (wherever possible), thus pupils can help themselves as required, i.e., it will now be optional. This has been communicated to parents and schools prior to the launch of the spring menu, to inform them that water will still be provide upon request for those with no access to reusable water bottles;

- A trial has been launched in 12 schools in March 2018 with new sandwich packaging – trialling a flow wrapped film opposed to a sandwich wedge. It is estimated that flow wrapped sandwiches save 50% on traditional wedge packaging;
 - Discussions are ongoing with Vegware. Their products are low carbon, made from renewable or recycled materials, and all can be recycled along with food waste where facilities exist. The main issue is that the cost of switching to the Vegware product is significantly more expensive than the current product;
 - The service is switching to a new yogurt supplier with the yogurt packaged in printed pots, made of a very thin gauge of polypropylene; and
 - Work is continuing with the drinks supplier to develop a tetra pack water carton that could replace our current plastic bottle of water. This would dramatically reduce the amount of plastic bottles we currently use. The supplier is in early stage of development but we hope to be able to trial this as soon as it has been developed.
- 3.18 The service has also drafted an environmental performance framework which is currently being reviewed, which will govern the policies and procedures within catering.

Menu Design Process

- 3.19 The catering team work to implement nutritionally balanced, appealing menus to our children across the estate. When creating a menu consideration is given to previous feedback obtained through the “food in schools mailbox” and, where possible, these are incorporated into the menu for the next term. Each term a menu leaflet is distributed to all schools with the following information; the new terms menu, details on free school meals, changes to the menu and the e-mail address foodinschools@edinburgh.gov.uk for parents to contact the service with comments or queries. Feedback is proactively encouraged and how to do has been added to the annual menu booklets to parents along with highlighting some of the changes as a result of previous feedback.
- 3.20 The service works with groups across varying levels such as pupil’s feedback, information provided to us from schools direct and kitchen staff to create a balanced menu, which promotes seasonal fresh produce and adheres to the requirements of the Schools Food and Nutrition Act 2007. Data from ParentPay is also used on an annual basis to review the meals that have been most popular on menu cycles. The service has looked at schemes such as the East Ayrshire Council school meals survey, which is completed on-line and the results are published annually.

- 3.21 There has been a significant increase in the volume of vegetarian meals produced in our schools over the last three years. To further promote this, and as highlighted earlier in this report, the service has signed up to the Meat Free Monday campaign. This will be monitoring through-out its introduction and changes adapted based on feedback and uptake.
- 3.22 Moving forward the aim is to promote greater involvement with parent councils to gain their input into new menu design. Feedback from pupils is also important and comment cards for pupils were recently trialled in some of primary schools, to elicit comment.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 The successful retention of the Bronze FFL Catering Mark across the school estate.
- 4.2 Maintaining silver in 2 pilot schools and adding a further 2 schools to the silver award by the end of 2018.
- 4.3 Continued engagement with parent councils and the expansion of the use of feedback in the menu design process.
- 4.4 Continued review of production kitchen demands and transport requirements.
- 4.5 The continued reduction of plastics within the school estate.
- 4.6 The successful publication of the caterings Environmental framework document.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The cost of extending Food for Life to a further two schools can be contained within existing budgets. Any further expansion will require investment.
- 5.2 The capital and revenue cost of opening a further two production kitchens can be contained within existing budgets.
- 5.3 Any further switch on disposal spend, e.g., biodegradable product and/or tetra pack water is still to be established but there will be an increase in current spend.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 None identified.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 There are no negative equality or human rights identified as being impacted with this report.
- 7.2 There will be negligible impact to the economy as the new tender looks to build upon the current framework for sourcing local fruit and vegetables with the aim of

maximising this provision. The tender will build in community benefits and have a clear measurable scale for assessing the procurement of Scottish produce. This tender is not likely to have any great impact on any of the High relevance criteria. It is likely that this will further contribute to reducing the impacts on the environment by sourcing a greater amount of local produce, also further support the local economy.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Choosing to reduce the use of plastics in the supply chain is likely to have a positive effect on the environment.
- 8.2 The continued focus on spend on local produce is likely to have a positive effect on the local economy and reduce the carbon footprint.
- 8.3 The uptake in delivered meals is likely to have a negative impact on the environment due to the increase in vans transporting meals.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Consultation with pupils and parents is highlighted to continue and increase over the next menu cycle.

10. Background reading/external references

[School Meals update](#), Report to Education, Children and Families Committee, 13 December 2016

[School Meals Update](#), Report to Education, Children and Families Committee, 13 December 2017

Addendum by Green Group to Transport and Environment Committee, 9 March 2018

[APSE – School Meal Update](#)

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11. Appendices

- 11.1 None.