

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 22 February 2022

Motion by Councillor Burgess – Better School Milk

Executive/routine Wards Council Commitments	Executive All
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1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Policy and Sustainability Committee:
 - 1.1.1 Note the contents of the report, the anticipated costs and the potential challenges of introducing organic milk in schools; and
 - 1.1.2 Agree to progress with a pilot at St Andrews Primary School to help understand further the implications of making changes to the provision of non-organic milk in a school setting.

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Report

Motion by Councillor Burgess – Better School Milk

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report has been prepared in response to a motion by Councillor Burgess on Better School Milk.
- 2.2 The report will address the points raised in the motion and explains some of the good work already undertaken by the current framework provider, Council officers and school pupils. The report also recommends implementing a pilot trial of non-organic milk in a school setting to understand the implications of this change.

3. Background

- 3.1 The City of Edinburgh Council schools currently buy non-organic, semi-skimmed Scottish milk in 189 millilitre (ml) cartons.
- 3.2 Most of the milk is delivered to classrooms and nursery settings each day, as part of a mid-morning snack, in recyclable cartons with paper straws.
- 3.3 The remainder of milk purchased by the Council is used for cooking and bought in two litre cartons. The expenditure on this is minimal.
- 3.4 Mid-morning milk uptake in Edinburgh is one of the highest across all Scottish local authorities, with pupils enjoying fresh milk from 100% Scottish dairies, every school day.
- 3.5 East Ayrshire Council (EA) have adopted a pilot with Mossgiel Farm to provide organic milk to pupils across their estate (49 primary/secondary schools). Mossgiel Farm are a cooperative based in East Ayrshire, and as part of the pilot they have provided milk and the infrastructure to deliver self-decant (chargeable) to all settings.
- 3.6 It should be noted the cost to provide organic milk in Edinburgh schools would be considerably greater than EA, as the city has 111 primary and secondary buildings in the Council estate and a roll roughly three times larger.
- 3.7 On 23 September 2021, the following motion by Councillor Burgess was approved. This Council:

1. Notes the recent introduction of organic school milk along with a reduction in single-use plastic containers in East Ayrshire schools;
2. Recognises that organic milk can be healthier for children and that reducing single-use plastic and packaging can create less waste and is better for the environment;
3. Notes that pupils from Edinburgh schools, including James Gillespie's Primary School, have requested organic milk and reduced plastic packaging as long ago as 2019;
4. Therefore, requests a report into the introduction of organic school milk with reduced use of single-use plastic in Edinburgh Council-run schools to the Policy and Sustainability Committee within two cycles; and
5. Further notes that the Council's Single-Use Plastic Working Group has not met recently and requests that the group convenor schedules a meeting at the earliest opportunity in order to recommence this work.

4. Main report

Current Contract for School Milk

- 4.1 The Council is currently in the final year of a four-year contract with Muller Milk & Ingredients to provide milk to schools, care homes and Early Year establishments.
- 4.2 This contract was procured through Scotland Excel and covers all of Scotland's local authorities.
- 4.3 The City of Edinburgh Council has benefited from price stability of milk product throughout the duration of the contract and, in particular, with the current pressures on supply chain and inflationary pricing, the fixed price has been a key benefit to the Council.
- 4.4 As this contract is reaching its conclusion, a tender is due to be issued by Scotland Excel for a new four-year milk contract for all Scottish Local Authorities, with the aim of going live in April 2022. It is worth noting that, due to inflation, the cost of milk is expected to increase between 5% and 10% in the new contract.

Provision of Milk

- 4.5 Scottish Government policy documents on food and drink do not directly advise the consumption of organic milk over standard milk for school children. This is treated as a choice for milk providers.
- 4.6 The main requirement from the Scottish Government policy on food and drink is that local authorities should try, wherever possible, to promote food and drinks that are Scottish and are sourced from suppliers that promote ethical and sustainable standards. This is true for both organic and standard milk from the current contract provider, Müller Milk & Ingredients.

- 4.7 Other than providing glass bottles, Müller Milk & Ingredients currently have no plans to implement reusable or returnable packaging. Glass bottles are not appropriate for the school market due to the contamination risk with breakages etc, and the majority of schools have a no glass policy.

Organic and Standard Farming

- 4.8 The key difference between organic farming and standard farming is the use of natural fertilizers instead of chemical fertilizers (which are sometimes used in conventional farming).
- 4.9 In addition, it is noted that hormone and antibiotic treatments are not used in organic milk. However, Committee is asked to note that these are not used in Müller's conventional milk either. Müller confirm that all of the milk provided comes from Scottish farms and that their policy is not to milk any livestock undertaking antibiotic treatment for the period of the treatment.
- 4.10 Both organic and standard farming methods have stringent animal welfare and sustainability standards and all animals which require antibiotics when sick are subject to mandatory withdrawal periods before they can be milked again after administration of antibiotics.

Reducing the use of Milk Cartons

- 4.11 The alternative to providing milk in cartons for school and nursery pupils would be to provide facilities for milk to be decanted into individual cups which can be used more than once.
- 4.12 Whilst this would undoubtedly mean a reduction in recyclable milk cartons being used, there are additional issues which need to be taken into account when considering making this change including:
- 4.12.1 Refrigeration of milk in two litre bottles;
 - 4.12.2 Arrangements for transporting the milk to classrooms;
 - 4.12.3 Pouring in the classroom;
 - 4.12.4 Risk of spillages; and
 - 4.12.5 Potential for contamination if the cups are not washed correctly.
- 4.13 Edinburgh Catering Service, working with colleagues from Education and Children's Services, explored the options for pouring milk into reusable containers that can be used in milk machines in schools. This concluded that the main risk of doing so arose from the potential risk of contamination which was heightened in comparison to hygienically packed cartons.
- 4.14 Alternatively, the option of using a pergal machine (a pergal chills and stores a 13ltr package of milk and decants through a plastic nozzle) was considered. This would reduce the requirement to refrigerate milk in two litre bottles, would be provided more hygienically and would provide the greatest opportunity to reduce plastics (within food grade principles).

- 4.15 However, the use of energy and detergents to ensure the cleanliness of machine and cups could lead to increased costs of delivery (the current arrangements are low in terms of delivery costs) and a place a greater responsibility on school staff
- 4.16 If pergal machines were introduced, the number of machines would depend on the size of the school. The cost of delivery would increase as school teams would become responsible for pouring milk into cups, taking the cupped milk to classrooms and washing the cups and pergal after each use. Pupils could be encouraged to help with this; however, supervision would be required.

Cost of Providing Organic Milk and Making Arrangements for Self-Decanting of Milk

- 4.17 The difference in cost of raw milk between organic and standard is between 11–15p per litre and is also dependant on costs within the spot market. It is expected that, if City of Edinburgh Council were to move to providing only organic milk, the increase in cost would range from £83,000 to £113,000 per annum. This increase in costs would need to be addressed as part of a budget setting process or passed on to parents.
- 4.18 To set-up a scheme for self-decanting milk, investment would be required for washable plastic cups for each class. The average cost of these cups is around £1.25 and, based on a current primary and secondary school roll of 31,098, the cost is estimated to be in the region of £40,000. An annual budget would also be required to provide replacement cups.
- 4.19 The cost of a pergal machine is £525. This cost would be incurred for the pilot scheme but, if the scheme was adopted across Edinburgh, there may be an opportunity to get these costs subsidised.

Impacts of Changing to Organic and Self-Decanted Milk

- 4.20 It is important to note that it would not be possible to provide organic milk without making arrangements for this to be decanted.
- 4.21 To fully understand the environmental benefits of making such changes, analysis is required on the impact of reusables and returnables in the dairy industry. This is because there are already opportunities to use the longstanding infrastructure for recyclables.
- 4.22 Müller's bottles and Tetra Pak's are 100% recyclable in the "Closed Loop Life Cycle". Muller purchase recycled plastics to make new cartons/bottles.
- 4.23 In addition, improvements have already been achieved in the Council's schools, as pupils have encouraged action to remove single use plastic straws from paper school milk cartons. The replacement of plastic with paper straws has equated overall to removal of 48 tonnes of plastic already.
- 4.24 There is currently inconclusive evidence of the health benefits of organic milk use over standard milk.
- 4.25 It is also important to note that, in preparing this report, Council officers liaised with Stirling Council to understand their experience when provision of milk was

transitioned from 189ml paper cartons to two litre jugs. They found that there was a significant reduction of milk consumption, of up to 30%. This was because:

4.25.1 Children were no longer responsible for the amount of milk they consumed;

4.25.2 Of where it is poured; and

4.25.3 It was not offered to children in aesthetically pleasing, paper cartons filled to the correct amount with a paper straw provided for drinking.

4.26 In addition, several Edinburgh schools were asked for their thoughts on how these changes would affect mid-morning milk process.

4.27 From the schools that were approached, the majority said that they felt it was not currently feasible for them to implement self-decanting milk arrangements for the reasons set out in paragraph 4.12. However, the schools identified the main issue as staffing as they indicated that they did not think it would be possible within the current staffing numbers within their schools.

4.28 However, of the schools contacted, St Andrews Primary has volunteered to trial the decanting milk into cups for each class. They have indicated that they expected to see environmental benefits such as reduction in excessive packaging and packaging waste. However, they have indicated they would be happy to continue to provide 'regular' milk rather than switching to organic milk.

5. Next steps

5.1 Committee is asked to note the work carried out to identify the costs, benefits and challenges associated with changing from standard to organic milk and of introducing self-decanting milk arrangements in Edinburgh schools.

5.2 However, in order to fully understand how such changes would work in practice, it is proposed to pilot the provision of decanted standard milk in St Andrews Primary for the term Easter to Summer 2022. It is not felt to be practicable to use organic milk for this pilot as there would be no way in which to measure health benefits to children and the procurement of a relatively small amount of organic milk would not be efficient.

6. Financial Impact

6.1 The volume of organic milk produced in Scotland is far less than standard milk and it is therefore more expensive.

6.2 The estimated cost for providing organic milk across all Edinburgh schools is set out in paragraph 4.17.

6.3 The cost of providing cups for decanted milk is outlined in paragraph 4.12.

6.4 Most of the milk consumed at the mid-morning break in Edinburgh schools is paid for by parents. If the Council were to decide to rollout organic milk across schools,

then the additional costs would either need to be covered by the Council or passed on to parents.

- 6.5 In addition, an existing subsidy covers only approximately four pence on every drink consumed (Rural Payments Agency). The advance funding received does not meet the additional cost per unit if that product was organic milk decanted into recyclable cups.
- 6.6 In order to pilot the changes at St Andrews Primary school, it is proposed that the additional costs are met by the Council rather than by asking parents to meet these costs. It is estimated that the cost of the pilot (1 term) will be circa £1,900 and will be met from the current Education services budget as responsibility for milk sits with this service area.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 As outlined in paragraph 5.1, these proposals have been discussed with several schools.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Differences in the Nutritional Composition of Organic Versus Conventional Milk | Dairy Nutrition](#)
- 8.2 [Organic milk: Does it confer health benefits? - ScienceDirect](#)
- 8.3 www.reading.ac.uk/news-archive/press-releases/pr631737.html
- 8.4 [An appetite for opportunity | Strategy& UK \(pwc.com\) – signed up](#)
- 8.5 [Müller unveils new environmental incentive programme for farmers | News | The Grocer](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 None.