

Education, Children and Families Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 5 September 2023

Free Food Provision in Schools - Response to motion by Councillor Davidson

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended Education, Children and Families Committee notes:
 - 1.1.1 The update on food provision in schools;
 - 1.1.2 The challenges that the Council faces with rising costs and inflationary pressures; and
 - 1.1.3 Work underway to tackle food waste in schools:

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Free Food Provision in Schools - Response to motion by Councillor Davidson

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report responds to a motion approved by Committee on 6 June 2023 by Councillor Davidson on Free Food Provision in Schools. The motion requested a report in one cycle outlining the current challenges with the procurement process and what solutions could make the food easier to obtain.

3. Background

- 3.1 This report was prepared in response to the following motion which was agreed at Education, Children and Families Committee on [6 June 2023](#). Committee notes:
- 3.1.1 The Cost-of-Living Crisis is still very much a reality for many children and families across the city and has had an impact on the wellbeing on young people, particularly in terms of hunger.
 - 3.1.2 That well-fed young people have better academic opportunities and wellbeing and that as of February 2023, 25 Council-run secondary schools across Edinburgh provide some form of breakfast club, and 15 distribute free food in other ways.
 - 3.1.3 Teachers from multiple schools have raised concerns about the cost of sourcing food through the approved Council procurement channel.
- 3.2 Therefore, committee requests a report in one cycle outlining the current challenges with the procurement process and what solutions could make the food easier to obtain.

4. Main report

Food Service Sector

- 4.1 Food contracts are negotiated through the Scottish Government's procurement service – Scotland Excel. The primary role of these contracts is to provide a stable

pricing structure across the 32 Scottish Local Authorities and to mitigate inflationary pressures (currently on food at 17.2%)

- 4.2 The Council utilises these frameworks for both large national suppliers (such as Brakes) and small local suppliers (such as George Anderson and Sons). These products are primarily used in schools and care homes to feed the 23,000 pupils and 600 residents whose meals are provided by the Council's catering service each day.
- 4.3 The Foodservice industry remains under constant and seemingly continuous pressures. These pressures include:
 - 4.3.1 Trying to build back following the pandemic;
 - 4.3.2 Recent increases in energy costs;
 - 4.3.3 Continued staffing shortages;
 - 4.3.4 Supply chain issues; and
 - 4.3.5 Food inflation, with predicted future inflation expected to be at a higher rate due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (Year-on-year inflation in the foodservice sector hit 17.2% in 2023. The double-digit increase was fuelled by challenges including a surge in demand, the lingering impacts of the pandemic, additional costs of trade after Brexit and increases in energy and packing prices.)
- 4.4 Due to the nature of the contracts, suppliers tend to only sell products in large "wholesale" packaging. This is due to several factors but primarily cost for the operator and that the vast majority of small pack sized products are bought up and monopolised by the retail sector (which means that wholesalers costs for the hospitality trade are significantly higher with uncompetitive prices).

Council Procurement and Food Supplies for Schools

- 4.5 As a result of the suppliers "cost to serve" – namely the cost of picking and delivery to schools - there are minimum order values for Council premises. Settings such as breakfast clubs and after school clubs mitigate this through buying in bulk, with the school office co-ordinating orders for any food-based activities. In high schools, Health and Food Technology (HFT) leads will place orders weekly for goods required for cookery lessons.
- 4.6 The vast majority of products listed on Oracle can be used in the wide variety of settings across the Council – with over 85% of Council buildings receiving one or more deliveries of food stuffs per week.
- 4.7 For smaller settings and one-off purchases, the Council has an agreed process of buying retail items from the main supermarkets through a purchase card. This is usually held by the school Business Manager, with the expenditure forming part of the school's budget.

School Food

- 4.8 The City of Edinburgh Council are bound to comply with the Scottish Government's legislative requirements for school food in Scotland. This dictates the quality and nutritional value of all food consumed on school premises.
- 4.9 Food waste education is promoted in schools and menu items and products are monitored regularly to ensure they are within the legislation. ParentPay is utilised for menu ordering to allow the kitchen to only produce meals that are ordered by parents.
- 4.10 Council officers have been heavily involved in the provision of meals for the city's "Discover!" holiday activity provision and more recently "Epic Days". This service provides high quality, nutritious lunches to those who may go without during school holiday periods.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Council officers will continue to encourage the use of purchase cards for purchasing retail items from local shops and will continue to monitor the range and requirements of products available for school food provision.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 All costs of food provision in schools are contained within the schools' allocated budgets.
- 6.2 Free School Meals are funded by the Scottish Government

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The provisions and accessibility referred to in the report highlight the approach to food across the service. The Council's approach to food supports equality across the service and allows access to food to all service users.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 As a public body, the Council has statutory duties relating to climate emissions and biodiversity. The Council:-

"must, in exercising its functions, act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets"

(Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019), and

“in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”

(Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004)

- 8.2 The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to work towards a target of net zero emissions by 2030 for both city and corporate emissions and embedded this as a core priority of the Council Business Plan 2023-27. The Council also declared a Nature Emergency in 2023.

Environmental Impacts

- 8.3 Food waste in schools plays a pivotal role in environmental impact.
- 8.4 The Council utilises the ParentPay system to ensure only meals ordered by parents are produced – this has reduced kitchen waste by 22% since the system was introduced. Each kitchen has a clear food bin where the unit manager can review and record the items being wasted, which is then collated by a central team to identify any items proving high waste for product re-engineering.
- 8.5 The biggest waste comes from plate waste (i.e. waste from meals served but not eaten). Schools are responsible for managing this process, within the guidance provided.
- 8.6 The Council has food and health education frameworks for each level to guide progressive delivery of the curriculum. Food waste features at each level through the journey of food, identifying how to prevent food related waste and food safety to reduce spoilage.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 This paper seeks to clarify the access to food by various Council stakeholders. It also seeks to address the consultation with stakeholders in allow various methods of procuring food products this is consistent with the Council’s commitment to ensuring that everyone’s voices are heard and listened to.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 None.

11. Appendices

- 11.1 None.