

The Highland Council
ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICE COMMITTEE

25 September 2013

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	ACS/93/13

School Meals Stakeholder Group Progress Report

Report by Director of Education

Summary

The Adult and Children's Services Committee agreed in November 2012 that stakeholders group be formed to examine how school meal uptake could be improved. Progress was reported to this Committee in January 2013 and this report provides Members with the second update on the progress of the group.

1. Background

- 1.1 This report contributes towards the following outcomes in Working together for the Highlands:
- The Council will work to alleviate poverty by encouraging benefit uptake and supporting a range of advice services;
 - The Council will promote and support local food production and continue our support for Fairtrade
 - The Council will work with NHS Highland to achieve public health targets for healthy weight
- 1.2 Poor diet is a significant contributor to Scotland's poor health record. Improving children's diet can make a major impact on the health of children with beneficial outcomes for educational attainment and improved health in later life. The Group aims to improve the diets of children through increasing the uptake of school meals, in particular free school meals and make links to curricular activity ensuring that a whole school approach is taken.
- 1.3 The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 required local authorities to promote the uptake and benefits of school meals and, in particular, free school meals (FSM) and reduce the stigma associated with FSM by requiring local authorities to protect the identity of these eligible.
- 1.4 The National Still Hungry for Success Group is chaired by Hugh Fraser, Director of Education. Beyond the School Gate is a parallel group at national level which aims at developing partnerships to create better circumstances outside the school gate. The work of the School Meals Stakeholder Group is compatible with the work of both groups.
- 1.5 It is important to note that school meal uptake is not just a Catering Services issue. The Service has worked hard to implement and promote food and nutrition standards. Input is essential from school management teams to explore ways to improve school meal uptake through actions such as staggered lunch breaks, lunchtime activities and pre-ordering to reduce queuing. It links to classroom teaching and the curriculum, wider Council Services, communities and local businesses.

2. Progress

2.1 The Stakeholder Group has met 4 times to date. It has reviewed earlier work to explore what lessons could be learned and sought future pilots to test new ways of working:

2.2 *Pilot work in Schools*

Inverness High School and Dingwall Academy worked in association with MFR around 2 years ago to promote school meals and address low uptake.

2.2.1 The High School has high levels of free school meals eligibility, is the only secondary school that gets its meals from another school and there was very little space for the consumption of meals. Work was carried out with a radio personality and pupils appeared to enjoy the attention and process. As a result the canteen was refurbished into an American diner style with new furniture, the Head Teacher gave permission for the use of the large hall and a new Pasta Pronto service was introduced. This work resulted in an increased uptake of school meals and some food is now made on the premises.

2.2.3 This intervention was less successful in Dingwall, which is a much newer building and has a large supermarket nearby. Lunchtime discos were held but did not have much impact. However the project led to the successful onsite policy noted at 2.5 of this report, which has resulted in some pupils continuing to use the canteen after the intervention was concluded.

2.3 *Kilchuimen Academy*

Kilchuimen Academy and Kilchuimen Primary School. School meal uptake is low. Catering staff met with the Pupil Council who could not identify any reasons as to why uptake was low. New furniture had already been provided and the Active Schools Co-ordinator had funded a flat screen TV for the dining area.

2.3.1 A pupil questionnaire was circulated to ascertain pupil views. The results did not identify a clear reason for low uptake. Of 41 pupils surveyed 26 bought food from a shop/takeaway and 6 brought a packed lunch, however 37 pupils reported that canteen food was excellent, good or neither good or bad with only 4 reporting it as poor. No clear issues emerged with regard to other issues such as queuing or the canteen environment.

2.4 *Nairn Academy*

Nairn faces competition both from the high street and mobile food vans immediately outside the school gates. The school piloted the “Hungry Hut” which has been very well received by pupils who perceive it as an attractive alternative for pupils who prefer to buy and consume their food outside. It has increased school meals uptake by 5.5% and is taking around £150 per day.

2.4.1 The combination of the “Hungry Hut” and the introduction of cashless catering has reduced queuing times and has meant that the school has been able to reduce the lunch break from 55 minutes to 45 minutes, ending the school day earlier to adjust the time. This has reduced “hanging about time” and the need for voluntary staff supervision over lunchtimes.

2.5 Onsite Policies

Dingwall Academy piloted an on-site policy for Secondary 1 pupils between August and October 2012. It was well received by parents. Initial feedback from pupils was mixed, but concerns related to fairness of the phasing in of S1 pupils being allowed to leave the site, rather than a concern with the onsite policy itself. This is now being extended to cover the period from August to Easter.

2.5.1 During the pilot school meals uptake increased by 2% and this has continued.

2.6.2 Other schools that operate on site policies are Alness Academy S1; Golspie High School S1 and 2; Fortrose and Tain Academies S1 from August until October and Gairloch, Kinlochbervie and Ullapool High Schools and Dornoch Academy all have a whole school onsite policy.

2.6 The Band System in Primary Schools

This has brought improvements in several primary schools. Pupils select a coloured band at morning registration, to indicate which meal they intend to choose at lunchtime. This means that the cook knows in advance, how many of each meal should be prepared. This has 3 benefits: pupils no longer find that the meal they wanted has run out; queues are reduced; and there is less waste

2.7 Catering Staff involvement in Parent Evenings

This has proved to be a very successful intervention. Catering staff can give information about nutritional content of school meals, availability of special diets if required and free school meals eligibility and application processes. Schools are encouraged to include their cook at meetings.

2.8 The key learning from these examples is:

- What works in one school will not necessarily work in another;
- The involvement of school management is crucial for success – it is not just a catering service issue;
- Targets for increase in uptake would need to be set on an individual school basis.

3. New Pilots

3.1 Head teachers were contacted at the end of the last school term and asked if they would volunteer to pilot an intervention over the 2013/14 school year or longer if required, that might increase school meal uptake. A menu of potential pilots to select from was circulated to prompt ideas.

3.2 Eleven schools responded positively and of those the following schools have been selected to work up pilots:

- Kingussie High School
- Invergordon High School
- Charleston Academy
- Cawdor Primary School

Progress on these pilots will be reported to this Committee.

4. Universal Credit

- 4.1** Families in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) will be eligible for free school meals (FSM), however some families who currently receive a “passporting benefit” may fall below new criteria for UC and inequalities may widen as those families will still be on a low income and are likely to find school meals expensive. These households will have to find around £400 per child per year if they are to begin paying for school meals. If they are not willing or able to pay for a school meal, it could have an impact on school meal uptake. More importantly, this group are likely to include many families at high risk of poor health outcomes.
- 4.2** The Group is exploring the introduction of marketing materials for FSM which could be included as part of the first newsletter of term, in school enrolment and welcome packs as well as general poster displays. The cost of this will be met through existing budgets.

5. Implications

5.1 Resources

There will be a small cost to developing marketing materials which can be met from within existing budgets. Resource implications of future proposals will be identified prior to submission to Committee for approval. Members should also note that each paid meal provided is subsidised by £1.08 for Secondary and £1.28 for Primary meals and each free school meal provided costs £3.08. Therefore increases in uptake of school meals and free school meals will incur these costs per additional meal in each category.

Legal

The actions of the Group are in keeping with the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007.

Equalities

There are no equality impacts resulting from the content of this paper.

Climate Change

There are no climate change impacts resulting from the content of this paper.

Risk

There are no risk implications identified at this stage of the group’s work.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 Members are asked to note:

The progress of the School Meals Stakeholder Group

6.2 Members are asked to agree:

That a report on the progress of the pilot sites will be submitted to this Committee

Signature: Hugh Fraser

Designation: Director of Education

Date: 16 September 2013

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