



JOINT REPORT TO EDUCATION, LEARNING AND LEISURE COMMITTEE ON THURSDAY 29 AUGUST, 2013 AND SCRUTINY AND AUDIT COMMITTEE ON WEDNESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2013

CATERING PROGRESS

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1.1 note the contents and comment on this update report.

2 Background / Discussion

a) Management

2.1 In January 2010 responsibility for the school catering service transferred to Education, Learning and Leisure and was included within the remit of Support Services. Up until this time school catering had been within Planning and Environmental Services.

2.2 In August of 2010 a new Catering Services Manager took up post. Following his appointment the senior management structure of the catering service was reviewed and changes made to responsibilities and remits of post holders within the team to achieve operational efficiency and improvement. This resulted in an improvement in the financial position, which is now operating within budget. Required budgetary savings have also been achieved. Regular monitoring meetings ensure any areas of potential concern are addressed as priority. Financial management at individual school site level allows for better management control of operations.

2.3 A review of catering staffing is carried out annually. This looks at meal uptakes in relation to school rolls and staffing input hours are calculated and adjusted accordingly.

b) Sourcing and Procurement

2.4 The school catering service piloted on-line ordering through iProcurement within the authority. This meant that all schools kitchens were provided with desk top computers or laptops and had the added benefit of improving financial reporting, communication and dissemination of information to catering staff at school sites. Additional on-line reporting of sickness and absence, stock taking and other financial returns is all now completed at kitchen level.

2.5 Recent press reports highlighted the use of prepared cooked chicken from Thailand in school kitchens. This product which complies with all relevant EU legislation and meets Scottish Government's nutritional regulations is purchased for school catering by twenty-five of Scotland's thirty-two local authorities. Use of this product eliminates risk from taking raw chicken into school kitchens and provided an annual saving of approximately £70,000. A

Scottish 'Red Tractor' or 'Freedom Food' accredited alternative, if available in sufficient quantity, could cost an additional £105,000 per year.

- 2.6 Through close working with the Central Purchasing Unit and Scotland Excel the service benefits from buying through national contracts. This does not, however, prevent local sourcing, such as for butchery, which earlier this year was beneficial in ensuring that the school catering service in Aberdeenshire was unaffected by concerns over the presence of equine DNA in meat products. Not only are all main meals prepared freshly in school kitchens but quality assurance provides traceability to local source of meat purchased. Local suppliers also provide fresh fruit and vegetables and fresh bakery produce. Although milk is supplied from a national firm it is nearly all sourced from the local area. The main fish used in schools, though frozen and supplied by a national company, is landed in Peterhead and processed in Aberdeen.
- 2.7 The price for a school meal in Aberdeenshire's primary schools is currently £2.00 which is lower than in Aberdeen City and the same as that charged in Moray, our neighbouring authorities. Earlier this year press reports, following release of information by Scottish Government, suggested that Aberdeenshire had the lowest total cost to the authority, at £1.68, for meal provision of any Scottish Local Authority. The true cost was approximately £3.60 for 2010/11 (from audited accounts). The APSE, Education Catering Performance Report 2011/12 details the total cost of providing a lunchtime meal at approximately £3.15. This is average for Scotland and is in line with costs incurred in a wide geographical area.
- 2.8 The school catering service has comprehensive web pages on the Council's website and these provide a full range of information for pupils and parents. The service has a 'quick response code matrix' that can be scanned to access the web pages via smart phones. It is also planned in the future to introduce access to promotions and advertise theme days.
- 2.9 A four week cycle menu is provided to all primary schools in Aberdeenshire and this changes twice each year in April and October. The menu is planned and analysed to ensure that it is both attractive to customers and conforms to the requirements of the Nutrition Bill. Menus are sent home to all primary parents to encourage meal uptakes and allow parents to help children make meal choices. The menu is on line on the school catering web pages along with copies translated into Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian. The menu leaflet has an attractive and colourful design which was developed along with the in house design team.
- 2.10 A new design for menus and promotional posters for Academy canteens has been developed and is being introduced in three academies (Inverurie, Mackie and Mintlaw) to gain pupil feedback prior to rolling out to all academy canteens across Aberdeenshire
- c) Service Delivery
- 2.11 Over the last two years the catering service has become more involved at an early stage in the planning and design of kitchens and dining areas in new schools and this ensures that facilities are fit for purpose to provide a quality

service to pupils. It is important that investment continues over future years to ensure that proper, fit for purpose kitchens are available to enhance the meal experience and hopefully encourage an increase in meal uptakes.

- 2.12 Until late 2011 cashless catering systems had only been installed in six academies as the means of payment by pupils for meals and snacks. Efficient management of catering services budget allowed for installation of systems to be completed in all seventeen academies by the end of the 2011/12 financial year. This has resulted in an increase in sales as queues are reduced and the speed of service increased. Pre order kiosks have been introduced and these allow pupils to order and pay during the morning for quick collection at lunchtime. This service is very popular in many academies and is currently being promoted with special deals only available to pupils using the pre order system. In late 2012, the facility for pupils and parents to add monies to their cashless catering accounts was introduced on-line via the Council's website. This has been well received and parents are being encouraged to use this system which ensures their children are buying lunch in schools.
- 2.13 The cashless catering system in academies ensures anonymity for pupils in receipt of free school meals and with the system being hosted on a central server this allows the service to monitor uptake of school meals and in particular highlight any pupils not making use of the free school meal allowance. This information can then be fed back to schools to allow staff to address with particular pupils and/or parents reasons why the allowance is not being taken up.
- 2.14 From the recent Healthy Living Survey completed for Scottish Government, the total number of meals provided in schools each day in Aberdeenshire was recorded as approximately 16,500; of this 11,000 are primary school meals and 5,500 secondary school meals. Each day approximately 2000 meals are transported from production kitchens to fifty-six serveries located in primary schools with no onsite kitchen.
- 2.15 Uptake of meals in Aberdeenshire schools as confirmed in the APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence), Education Catering Performance Report 2011/12 was 52% in primary schools and 42% in secondaries. This compares well against average uptakes which are 42% and 36% respectively. The recent Healthy Living Survey completed for Scottish Government would indicate that the primary schools' meal uptakes have now increased to 58% in Aberdeenshire.
- 2.16 To help increase uptakes the catering service works closely with contracted suppliers and regularly introduces new products that may appeal to pupils in academies. The service runs promotions in schools including a '2 for 1' offer. This allows parents to accompany P1 children to experience a school meal when they first join school. P7 pupils are encouraged to use the canteen during induction days at academies and briefing is provided on the cashless catering system at this time along with an introduction to the catering service provided.

- 2.17 The ability to hear directly from customers and to respond provides the service with the opportunity to develop and improve. The service has two customer feedback e-mail boxes for primary and secondary enquiries respectively. Both e-mail box addresses are advertised on the primary school menu leaflets, academy pupil welcome leaflets and on the school catering service web pages on the Council's web site.
- 2.18 A range of queries are made to the service. However, of forty-eight queries received in 2012 only five were complaints. These messages are relayed to appropriate Area Catering Officers who confer with Unit Cook/Supervisors to resolve any issues raised by customers. The customer is notified how any issues raised will be addressed and outcomes.
- 2.19 Comments received from parents are most often regarding availability of choice, particularly in schools with no onsite kitchen. These schools provide meal numbers to the production kitchen early in the morning, giving a split of the meal choices. Often pupils forget the choice they made or may change their mind before lunchtime and although extra food is always provided to cover this, sometimes a pupil may not receive their first choice of meal.
- 2.20 Currently, meals in many primary schools are served on meal platters. However, as replacements are required the use of platters is being phased out, with the exception of for pupils in early primary years. Trays and rigid melamine plates are being purchased for use in primary schools to enhance the meal service. In academies the use of disposable plates and cutlery is also being reduced and china plates and metal cutlery are being used to improve the food service for pupils.
- 2.21 The Catering Services Manager is a committee member of ASSIST, the national Scottish association for FM services in local authorities and as such is able to network effectively with colleagues from other areas. Membership of the association allows the service to participate in Scottish School Meals Week, which ran from 4 to 8 March when an American theme day proved particularly popular, and the Scottish School Cook of the Year competition.
- 2.22 It is planned to pilot a ticketless system during the forthcoming school year for purchasing and ordering of meals in primary schools and this will include the ability for parents to pay on-line.
- 2.23 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Corporate Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

3 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications

- 3.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the recommendation to Committee to note the contents of this update report has no differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The School Meals Service is committed to continue to modernise and improve the service. This report details the key areas of activity work to date.

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Date: 1 August 2013