

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 24th September, 2008.

Present: Cllr David Harrington (Chairman), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Phillip Broughton, Cllr Mick Eddy, Cllr Miss Barbara Inman, Cllr Alan Lewis, Cllr Andrew Sherris

Officers: J. Trainer, M. Henderson (LD); E Shassere (CESC)

Also in attendance: Anita Brown and Jackie Sharp - Catering and Cleaning (DNS)

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Ann Cain and Cllr Maurice Frankland

1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **Minutes of the Meeting Held 27th August 2008**

CONCLUDED that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 27th August 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

3 **Review of Obesity**

The Chairman welcomed Anita Brown and Jackie Sharp from the Council's Catering Service who were in attendance, as witnesses, to provide evidence for the Committee's review of obesity. It was noted that the Council's Catering Service provided catering to 65 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 4 special schools.

The Chairman explained that, prior to the meeting, the witnesses attending had been provided with questions to assist with the gathering of evidence.

Mrs Brown explained that, taking account of the questions that had been submitted, she had prepared documentation that sought to answer many of the questions. The documents were circulated to all Members of the Committee present. Mrs Brown provided a brief overview of the documents circulated.

Coming from additional questions from Members and subsequent debate a number of issues were highlighted. These included:-

* the Catering service had started to move away from processed foods as early as 2004, however, this was hastened following the Jamie Oliver series of programmes on school meals. Following the series the take up of school meals had reduced.

* the service introduced salad bars which were a huge success in schools.

* the service had worked with suppliers to provide healthy meals, however, this had inevitably increased food costs. Focus groups identified that the cost of school meals was a major concern for parents and particularly those with more than one child, of school age.

- * there was evidence that the healthy meals, children received at school, were not repeated when the children got home. A parents cooking club had been formed to encourage healthy practices, but was poorly attended.
- *Thornaby Community School, which required pupils to remain in school during lunch breaks had a 70% uptake of school meals. Billingham Campus School which allowed pupils to go off site during lunch breaks had a 27 - 28% take up. The service was effectively competing against a local garage and other establishments.
- * Customer demand effectively determined meal portion size. School catering staff were provided with recipes and exact portion sizes. Salad bars were 'help your self' and children determined their own portions. Mrs Brown explained that, outside of schools, commercial establishments often bulked out meals with additional pasta/chips, as this was what the customer wanted.
- * The Rosies Passport project had been very popular and encouraged children to eat healthy meals and 'clean their plates'. Under the scheme every child, with a clean plate, won a sticker which could lead to a prize. 26 schools had signed up to the programme so far.
- * It was suggested that the Rosies Passport scheme had assisted in reducing food wastage and portion sizes.
- * Happy lunchtime helper scheme encouraged children to help other children, younger than themselves with portion size and serving themselves balanced meals.
- * Regular taster sessions were held with children to familiarise them with new healthy foods. Other taste and score sessions helped establish what meals children would like to see on their menus. Parents' taster sessions were also held to engage with mums and dads.
- * The service had invested in software that enabled it to ensure that all its recipes were balanced and in accordance with government requirements.
- * Children with special dietary requirements due to their religion were catered for, as were children with special requirements for medical reasons. It was noted that all meat and chicken used at Bowesfield School was Halal.
- * It was explained that the School Meals Action Plan, detailed in the documentation, provided to the Committee, was driven by the Obesity Group.
- * School Food Trust had brought in standards on packed lunches prepared by parents.
- * It was indicated that where a headteacher was supportive of the service's initiatives uptake of meals was higher than if they were not.
- * Some school meals were offered at a loss and government subsidy was intended to make up the difference. Mrs Brown indicated that she would supply the Committee with further relevant financial information.

* Breakfast clubs - it was suggested that information was available within the Council that had analysed the attendance at breakfast clubs and drawn a comparison between areas of deprivation. Attempts to access this information would be made.

* The effect of peer pressure, on take up of school meals, was highlighted in terms of children leaving the school premises or choosing to eat a possibly unhealthy packed lunch.

* The effect of fast food establishments sited close to schools was discussed and it was queried what powers, if any, the Council had in this regard. The Chairman undertook to raise this with the Head of Planning.

* All Primary Schools were now subject to government standards on school food and this would also apply to all Secondary Schools by September 2009.

* With regard to non school operations, undertaken by the Catering Service, it was recognised that customer preferences were not always healthy. The Service, therefore, had to have regard to both providing healthy food and satisfying the needs of the customer.

* Members discussed issues surrounding the Catering Service's ability to recover government funding, ringfenced for food, from individual schools. Chairman indicated he would raise this issue with the Finance Manager for Children and Young People.

The Chairman requested that the Committee's thanks to Anita Brown and Jackie Sharp be formally recorded in the minutes. He considered that the information provided and discussion that had taken place would be of significant assistance.

CONCLUDED that the information provided be received and the additional information identified be sought viz:-

- a) financial information relating to the cost of meals and government subsidies.
- b) information relating to breakfast clubs.
- c) powers of the Council relating to the siting of fast food outlets.

4 Work Programme

Members were provided with a revised Project Plan.

CONCLUDED that the revised Project Plan be approved.

5 Chairman's Update

The Chairman indicated that he would be undertaking the following:-

A request, for clarification, from the Head of Planning, on the Council's powers relating to the siting of fastfood outlets.

A note to the Events Team relating to concerns over the Council's commitment to reducing obesity and health eating versus its promotion of a National Parmo Competition.

A discussion with the Senior Finance Officer for Children and Young People regarding the Catering Service's ability to access government funding, specifically allocated for school meals.

CONCLUDED that the Chairman feedback any outcomes of the above.