

Cabinet

6 May 2014

Report from the Learning & Culture Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

School Meals Scrutiny Review Final Report - Cover Report

Introduction

1. This cover report presents the final report from the School Meals Scrutiny Review and asks Cabinet to approve the recommendations arising from the review.

Background to Review

2. At a meeting in June 2013, this Committee considered an introductory briefing provided by the Head of School Services & Directorate Support on the take up of school meals in general, and the take up of free school meals (FSM). The committee agreed the topic was suitable for scrutiny review and requested a scoping report for their July 2013 meeting.
3. In July 2013, the Committee received an introductory paper on the current provision of school meals and FSM in York, and considered a proposed timetable for carrying out the review. Based on the information provided, the Committee agreed the review remit detailed below:

Review Remit

Aim: To improve the take-up of school meals and free school meals

Objectives:

- To explore reasons for the relatively small increase in take-up of school meals across all York schools.
- To investigate why some parents/carers who are entitled, do not register and claim for free school meals and consider how the Local Authority working with partners can encourage them to do so.

- To investigate the reasons why significant numbers of entitled pupils whose parents/carers **have** registered and claimed, do not take up the offer of a free school meal.
 - To look at the effectiveness of cashless payment systems for school meals and their impact on school meal take-up.
5. The Committee also agreed to set up a Task Group made up of the following members, to carry out the review on their behalf:

Cllr Fiona Fitzpatrick (Task Group Chair)

Cllr Jenny Brooks

Cllr Ruth Potter

Mr Andrew Pennington (Co-opted Statutory Committee Member)

Consultation

6. In September 2013, the Task Group met with representatives of the Youth Council to gather their views on school meals – see paragraphs 38-42 of the final report shown at Appendix 1. They also carried out a number of school visits in support of their work on this review and gathered the views of parents – see paragraphs 44-46 of the final report attached.
7. Finally, during early 2014 the Task Group sought parents' views via a press release – see responses shown at Annex B to the final report attached.

Analysis

8. Over a series of meetings the Task Group gathered evidence in support of the review. The final report at Appendix 1 and its associated annexes includes a full analysis of the information gathered, the Task Group's conclusions and the recommendations endorsed by the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 19 March 2014.

Review Conclusions

9. From the evidence from school visits carried out, the Task Group agreed:

- Most schools recognise the difficulties of managing school meals and therefore given the option would choose to stick with the contract they are in.
- Schools are happy with the quality of food being provided by the current LA contract
- Creating the right culture and ethos in school is important i.e. where school management see catering provision as integral to the business of the school in supporting children's well-being and achievement, there is greater likelihood of encouraging take up of school meals
- The current cost of a school meal in York is a prohibitive factor in increasing take-up (see paragraph 52).
- The new duty to provide free school meals for all KS1 pupils will lead to an increase in the number of schools meals being taken in each primary school which in turn should enable the providers to reduce their meal price. This will benefit those parents who pay for school meals for children in KS2 and above.
- The new duty will have a significant impact on the arrangements in primary schools, not only on the number having a school meal but on the schools facilities, timings of teaching periods and lunchtime breaks etc and staff resources. The Task Group anticipate that schools should be able to see an improvement in readiness for learning in the afternoons.
- Contract negotiations for a new CYC school meals contract will present challenges. The current provider is understandably seeking a longer term commitment in exchange for competitive pricing for the remainder of the current contract. However, there could be a risk that this reduces flexibility for individual or groups of schools to establish their own arrangements in the future.

10. In regard to Primary Schools:

- The relationship between the Head Cook and Senior Leadership Team is key to the successful provision of school meals
- The majority do not want the responsibility of running their kitchens
- There are some concerns about the frequency of the delivery of fresh produce
- All are working to increase the number of FSM claimed
- All encourage their children to have a meal
- The caring ethos is very apparent and from the evidence from visits carried out, it is clear that equality issues are being

addressed to ensure all pupils can participate in each school's lunchtime arrangements

- More flexibility in payment options is required to enable parents on low incomes to pay for school meals – this would assist in increasing take-up of school meals

11. In regard to Secondary Schools:

- A number may choose to opt out of the CYC contract in the future as they are aware that they are subsidising primary schools and some consider the management fees high.
- Having seen the potential for making a profit in the future some may decide to provide schools meals themselves or make alternative contractual arrangements, either on their own or in collaboration with other schools.
- The layout of some dining areas makes it more difficult for schools to monitor the uptake of meals & FSM.
- Healthy eating options are provided but the age and preferences of secondary pupils make monitoring and encouraging take up difficult
- Pupils want more choice.
- Where parental and student views have been collected by schools, the cost of school meals is seen as an issue.

Review Recommendations

12. In light of the Task Group's findings the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee agreed to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- i. That the School Services Team/ Benefits Team carry out an annual check to identify those parents who are entitled, but not registered for FSM, and write to them to encourage them to claim.
- ii. The Local Authority should consider whether there is a role for it to act as advisor and/or broker/facilitator of innovative arrangements between those schools not in York's Local Authority contract.
- iii. Schools should be encouraged to be more flexible in when and how often parents can pay for school meals to ensure those on a low income are not excluded.

13. Finally, as a result of the introduction of universal infant free school meals from September 2014 in key stage 1, the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend that:
- iv. Catering providers who provide school meals in primary schools, be approached to work with the LA and schools to reduce the price of meals for those pupils in key stage 2, taking account of the expected significant increase in number of meals provided
 - v. Closer working relations be developed between the LA, schools and catering providers across York to promote the benefits of eating a healthy school meal - this to be run alongside the commencement of free school meals for all pupils in key stage 1.
 - vi. LA to monitor the introduction of free school meals in key stage 1 to look at the impact on primary schools with particular emphasis on space within the kitchen, access to appropriate equipment, the impact on the school day, and the possible knock on effects on key stage 2, with a report to Scrutiny in 12 months time

Council Plan 2011-15

14. Protect vulnerable people – by increasing free school meal take up more children from low income families will be able access a daily healthy meal.

Options

15. Having considered the final report at Appendix 1 and its associated annexes, Cabinet may choose to amend and/or approve, or reject the recommendations arising from the review as set out in paragraphs 10 & 11 of this report.

Implications & Risk Management

16. The implications and risks associated with the recommendations above are detailed in paragraphs 70-73 of the review final report at Appendix 1.

Recommendations

17. Having considered the final report and its annexes, the Cabinet is recommended to:

- i. Approve the recommendations shown in paragraphs 10 & 11 above.

Reason: To conclude the Scrutiny Review in line with CYC Scrutiny procedures and protocols.

Contact Details

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Report Approved

Date 14 April 2014

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Appendix 1 – School Meals Scrutiny Review Final Report