

### **Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services Questions to Officers on School Meals Prices and Officer Response**

#### **Why have prices increased?**

The contract is provided by North Yorkshire County Catering (NYCC) to the majority of schools in York. Prices reflect the impact of Job Evaluation in NYCC, improvements in the nutritional value of foods used in the meals and the level of take-up in schools.

The average cost of providing each primary meal within the contract is £2.30, the proposed selling price is £2.15. Each meal therefore has a subsidy of 15p which is met from the DCSF School Lunch Grant.

#### **Why are other authorities' school meal prices significantly lower than those in the City of York?**

The selling price of a school meal is rarely the same as the cost of producing it as many authorities have historically chosen to subsidise the selling price of school meals. These subsidies have usually come from within the education budget, reducing the amount of resource that can be distributed to schools through the school funding formula.

In York, since unitary status, the preferred position has been to see the cost of school meals met by income rather than diverting resources away from educating pupils. The exception to this is the cost of Free School Meals which are met by individual schools from their delegated budgets and which include an allowance for Free School Meals.

In recent years the costs of providing meals have risen due to the improved meal quality and some limited subsidy has been provided through the new DCSF School Meal/Lunches Grants

#### **What level of subsidy would be needed if the price of school meals were to be frozen?**

At the proposed selling price of £2.15 a subsidy of 15p per meal has been included at a cost of £239k met from the DCSF School Lunch Grant.

In order to keep to the current price of £2.05 a subsidy of 25p per meal would be required. This equates to an additional subsidy of £129k taking the total subsidy to £368k for 2009/10 academic year and assuming existing take-up rates.

#### **What are the options for further subsidy and where could such a subsidy come from?**

The School Lunch Grant has been fully committed in supporting the proposed selling price of £2.15 under option 3.

As the Schools Budget (and school funding levels) have now been set to the end of 2010/11 there is little scope to fund any further subsidy from within the existing education budget. The only alternative for any further subsidy would have to be general fund resources.

It is important to note that the School Lunch Grant is only guaranteed to the end of 2010/11 and subject to central government spending reviews beyond then.

### **What are the benefits of using some of the grant to purchase equipment?**

We want to use some of the funding to purchase equipment such as dishwashers. This would improve efficiency, improve working conditions for staff and save energy and water.

### **Why is there a different price in North Yorkshire Council to that in York?**

The price differential reflects the lower level of average take-up for York schools compared to North Yorkshire schools. This means that in York there are fewer meals over which management overhead costs can be spread.

The School Food Trust (SFT) survey 2008 showed primary take-up at 31.1% in York and 42.4% in NYCC, as a consequence NYCC set a selling price of £2.00 compared to £2.05 in York. York has worked extensively with the SFT to promote the take-up of school meals across the city. This encompasses a number of campaigns including discounted prices, free meal weeks and taster sessions. Historically there has been a 10% difference in take-up between the two authorities but as the same provider produces the meals it is likely that the difference is as a result of the location of schools in North Yorkshire and the lack of alternative options available in some of the villages.

### **How can parents/carers apply for free school meals?**

#### **What is the speed of processing an application for free school meals?**

Parents are encouraged to apply at the school or alternatively at Mill House. The entitlement can be backdated so parents can be reimbursed for any meals paid following the date of entitlement.

It is now possible for a parent to come into Mill House on a morning, have their application processed via the team immediately. If they are entitled, the Access team can ring the school and the child can receive a meal that day.

Leaflets and application forms were tabled for information.

### **Can parents or carers apply for free school meals on-line?**

They can obtain an application form from the Council's internet site. Some Authorities are piloting a scheme whereby applications can also be processed

on-line and this is something that the Access Team in York would welcome but it is not yet available.

**Are we doing everything possible to promote the take-up of school meals?**

Leaflets have been sent to all schools. The catering company also includes an information pack for new school starters. The uptake of free school meals is showing a slight increase month on month.

**The Shadow Executive Member has raised concerns regarding the implications of price increases on families in receipt of working tax credits, is there any way in which families in this position could receive some support in meeting the costs of school meals?**

We can look into this matter but this would not affect the current proposed prices.

**When were schools notified of the proposed increase in school meals price?**

They were notified on 3 July, following the meeting of the Schools Forum. At that time it was proposed to increase the price to £2.15.

**Was there any representation following the announcement?**

No, none was received.