

RESPONSE TO THE CHILDHOOD OBESITY TASK GROUP FROM THE SCHOOL MEALS CONTRACT TEAM

MARCH 2010

The Task Group asked the following questions (in bold):

Q1. Have other Local Authorities (like for like Authorities) got a bigger take up of school meals than York? If so, what are they doing different to us?

A comparison of take up with statistical neighbours and closest regional neighbours is attached at **Annex G1** to this report. York's take up rank is the second lowest for primary and secondary. Reasons for differences are much as detailed for the January meeting of the Task Group for local differences. National differences include:

- Levels of free school meals eligibility - York has the lowest primary free school meal (FSM) eligibility at 9.6% compared to top ranked Bury at 14.5%. York's secondary FSM eligibility is 8.1% compared to top ranking Stockport's 13.9%. York's relatively high rates of seasonal and/or part-time employment are likely to reduced eligibility. Low income families receiving Working Families Tax Credits are currently barred from claiming, although the government announced in their 2009 Pre Budget Report that all 'low income' families would be eligible from September 2011.
- Whether a school is responsible for any profit or loss from school meals provision – most authorities offering school catering operate on the basis of Service Level Agreements (SLAs). North Yorkshire recently reported that this approach has returned school meal take up in the NYCC area to 1970s levels when it was much higher. Private contractors will generally terminate a contract that is not making them money unless they are trying to get a foothold in an area, and it is the school's responsibility to make new arrangements.
- Selling price in relation to the time and cost of providing own school lunch, irrespective of quality. This is particularly relevant for primary school children, where parents are likely to prepare their lunches, and for large families where there are economies of scale. Prices are also affected by whether or not an authority out-sourced its school meals before job evaluation increased kitchen staff salaries.
- Level of subsidy paid to contractor by the council or school. Contract prices are commercially confidential information but five authorities who shared their data show subsidies of 10p, 51p, 74p, 90p and £1.47 with primary selling prices ranging from £1.30 to £1.87 (September 2009). York currently subsidises its primary contract price by 15p, selling for £2.15.

Q2. In relation to school meals in York Secondary Schools the Task Group would like to know/have:

- **The uptake of school meals in York secondary schools**

The table below gives a breakdown of York's secondary take up for 2008/09 for all schools.

Type of provision	Range of take up
Contract (NYCC)	18% - 37%
SLA (NYCC)	25% - 38%
Own	33%

NYCC currently provides meals for 9 out of 10 York secondary schools – 5 as part of the contract, 4 through SLAs. The tenth school provides its own meals, and their high take up of 33% compares well with the LA average of 28% (2008/09), and they have the highest secondary FSM in York of 20%. The two contract schools with the highest take up have opted out of the contract from July and are negotiating SLAs to profit from this. Both enforce lunchtime lock-in policies. The lowest performing SLA school has re-tendered and awarded the contract to a private contractor from Easter.

- **An example of a weekly menu**

Note from Scrutiny Officer - Examples of both primary and secondary school meal menus (from NYCC & other providers) have been received and considered by the Committee, however they have not been annexed to the final report.

- **What the most popular food choices are**

NYCC advise that “schools have additional recipes which they can substitute if a particular dish is not popular. Schools also record the number of portions of all dishes. Most secondary schools serve a large proportion of sandwiches, jackets or pasta pots rather than paying £2.30 for a 2 course meal. From a nutrition point of view it would be better for all pupils to have the 2 course meal but in the current financial climate spend is an issue. The nutritionally balanced menus went out to start in Sept 09. In addition a workshop was held for all secondary managers and their Assistant Cooks to improve their nutritional knowledge. The menus have been planned by a team of Secondary managers and all the recipes have been initiated and tested by various secondary schools”.

- Q3 For schools that don't use North Yorkshire Catering to provide their school meals the Task Group would like 2 examples of menus (one from a school in a deprived area and one not - they are happy for these to be anonymised)**

Note from Scrutiny Officer - Examples of these menus were received and considered but are not annexed to the draft final report.

Chartwells provide meals at the 3 PFI primary schools: St Barnabas and Hob Moor, who both have high levels of FSM, and St Oswald's, who have low FSM. Take up is higher than average at St Barnabas, slightly above average for Hob Moor and average at St Oswald's. Dolce provide meals at 2 schools, Haxby Road (high FSM and above average take up) and Huntington Primary (low FSM and below average take up). Nutritional standards apply to all schools irrespective of deprivation, therefore these menus are much the same as those previously supplied by NYCC.