

Report of Select Committee No.2

School Meals

Issued March 2006

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Executive Summary & Recommendations

This report details the findings of an investigation into the feasibility of providing free meals for all pupils in Wigan, and how our meals compare to the proposed national nutritional standards.

Our investigation was based on desk top research, interviews with experts in the relevant fields and consultation with relevant groups.

At the end of each section within this report are a series of recommendations. The full list of recommendations made by the Select Committee is:

- 1. That the Council does not introduce a free school meal scheme for every child in Wigan's primary schools at this time. We have explored the available evidence and evaluated the potential benefits and costs of such a scheme. Due to the significant cost, and the current lack of strong evidence linking such a scheme to improved health, attainment and behaviour we could not support the introduction of free meals.**
- 2. That the LEA encourages schools to return the additional funding for increased nutritional standards to the authority. This should then be linked with the separate funding given to the local authority to enable a co-ordinated effort to provide increasingly nutritious meals. The predominant amount of this pooled money should be spent on ingredient costs.**
- 3. Consideration has been given to providing a free piece of fruit to all primary pupils each day. This would extend the current provision from just infant age children to all primary school children. We feel that this scheme would be beneficial, but that priority should be given to recommendation 2. The provision of free fruit to all primary pupils should be re-evaluated, based on the impact of recommendation 2, prior to the end of the three-year funding period.**
- 4. Schools and their governing bodies should aim for a minimum of one hour for lunch breaks in all schools, starting no later than 12.30pm.**
- 5. MCCS should support schools who feel that they don't have the necessary space to accommodate all children at lunch without allowing children off site. Where possible, practical solutions such as staggered lunch breaks should be identified.**
- 6. The Select Committee recommends that MCCS develop a value for money indicator of meal content based on the cost and nutritional**

value of ingredients. We should propose that the government adopt this method of measurement.

- 7. A detailed school kitchen and dining area facilities study should be carried out by MCCS before the start of the 2006/07 academic year. Facilities for school meals should be a priority for all new schools built in the future.**
- 8. School cooks should be encouraged to, and supported in, marketing and promoting their service in school. MCCS should facilitate this change.**

Introduction

We started our review of school meals during August 2005. The purpose of this research was to investigate and identify recommendations in two distinct areas:

1. The feasibility of providing free school meals for all children in the borough.
2. The nutritional standards of school meals in Wigan and how they compare to the proposed national standards for nutrition¹.

The Select Committee agreed the terms of reference for this review. These helped scope the piece of research and identify the expert witnesses that needed to be interviewed. They also identified the key tasks to be carried out, and the essential information needed to inform the outcome of the review. These were agreed as:

- i. The benefits of providing free schools meals and benefits of achieving nutritional standards.
- ii. The current costs and prices charged for school meals and how they compare with other Local Authorities.
- iii. The number of children who would opt for a school meal if it was provided free of charge and the funding impact of this.
- iv. The nutritional standard of a typical school meal menu in Wigan and how this, along with the frequency of meals, compares to the proposed national standard. And how this might impact on a decision of free school meals for all.
- v. Identify the funding that would be required to bring school meals up to the proposed national nutritional standard, if necessary.
- vi. The impact from any local healthy eating initiatives or good practice.

A Best Value Review of the School Meals service was carried out in 2002. There was a quite different operating climate at the time of this review and this was reflected in its focus and subsequent recommendations. So recommendations to improve productivity and methods of production were highlighted. However, many of the issues identified in 2002 remain as challenges today. So the difficulties of balancing cost and meal take up are still evident although the pressures contributing to that may have shifted, especially in the past year.

During this review, the Government published a consultation paper¹ on the future of school meals. Within this consultation document were a series of

¹ Consultation document on proposed nutrition standards, "Turning the Tables – Transforming School Food". Published by DfES, 3rd October 2005.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conDetails.cfm?consultationId=1319>

recommendations to improve the nutritional standards of meals. Generally, the Select Committee supports these recommendations. There are certain issues that will require further clarification for Wigan, such as how effective procurement of ingredients will be factored in to the formula for ingredient spend on school meals. There are also some major challenges within this document, which, if they do form part of the national standards, will prove problematic. The major challenge is the need to meet the nutritional standards, which will include the removal of certain unhealthy (and popular amongst pupils) options from menus, whilst increasing take up and keeping costs reasonable. These, and other issues, have been raised by APSE² in their response, on behalf of member authorities, to the government's consultation document.

² Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE): Collective response to 'Turning the Tables'. Document available at <http://www.apse.org.uk/05-65.pdf>

Background - Local & National

In the 1970's and 1980's there were quite stringent nutritional standards for school meals. However, during the 1980's the take up of school meals nationally fell dramatically to a low of about 20%. The drive to increase school meal take up, together with the introduction of Compulsive Competitive Tendering, led to a greater emphasis on reducing costs and reducing the prices charged for meals. All of these factors led to a gradual reduction in the nutritional content of school meals and an increase in processed 'fun foods'. These changes did lead to a gradual increase in meal take up, both nationally and in Wigan.

The government introduced a set of standards for school meals in April 2001³. These standards focused on providing a 'balance of good health' through school meals. These standards say that lunches for pupils must contain items from each of the following food groups:

- Fruit and vegetables;
- Bread, other cereals and potatoes;
- Milk and dairy foods; and
- Meat, fish and alternatives.

However, the lack of any prescription to comply with these standards or any formalised method of audit, meant that they had little impact overall on the standards of school meals.

This was the position up to 2005. And in some areas of the country it led to extremely poor standards of food in schools as highlighted by Jamie Oliver in his television series. Many of the significant issues highlighted by Jamie Oliver were extremes, and not reflective of the situation in Wigan schools. However, this adverse publicity has had a negative impact on Wigan and other local authorities. The take up of school meals has fallen, both locally and nationally, and like many authorities we are struggling to recover that position.

³ DfES, 'Guidance for Caterers to School Lunch Standards'. Document available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches/default.shtml>

Methodology

We used the Best Value framework to inform our methodology for this review; the 5 C's of Challenge, Consult, Compare, Compete and Collaborate. Due to the nature of this review, and our specific aims (see page 5), certain elements of this framework were more relevant than others. This is reflected in the balance of this report.

We used a number of different approaches in order to identify our recommendations for school meals in Wigan. These included:

- **Desk top research**
- **Interviews with key expert witnesses**
- **Observation and interviews in schools**
- **Telephone interviews with head teachers**
- **Questionnaires for pupils**

This review was essentially a research project to investigate the possibility of providing free school meals, and the nutritional standards of school meals in Wigan. It was not a review of the service provided by MCCS. The content of this report, and particularly the recommendations reflect this.

Challenge

This section of the report is divided into three main sub sections. The first looks at the current position in Wigan in terms of costs and meal take up. The other two sections will take each of the two main areas of investigation and detail the major challenges and important information and the key recommendations that the Select Committee proposes.

A good starting point in challenging the current position is to ask; **what are we trying to achieve through our school meals service?** Through the discussions we have had with the key people involved in this service in Wigan, it is evident that all are extremely dedicated to providing an affordable, nutritious meal for all. But there are obvious challenges to this. All primary schools and all but two secondary schools receive a school meals service from Metropolitan Catering and Cleaning Services (MCCS). MCCS was created by the council during the period of Compulsive Competitive Tendering (CCT) and in effect is an in-house Direct Service Organisation (DSO). This means that MCCS begin each financial year with a budget of £0 and must endeavour to meet costs through income in order to achieve at least a break even position at the end of the year. MCCS is operating in a very competitive market and has been successful in maintaining a significant proportion of the business in Wigan. MCCS has also made significant strides in terms of the financial position; turning in a surplus profit of £76,100 in 2004/05. But this position is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain for a number of reasons. For example, the withdrawal of our involvement in non-schools catering at Haigh Hall is putting the service under increasing pressure with potential losses being predicted for the current financial year.

The Select Committee recognise the difficulties the council faces with the provision of school meals. A balance is to be achieved between providing a customer driven service that is effective financially in order to stay 'in business' and using its position to influence the types of foods that our children eat. This is especially important as the foods children eat in school can have an influence on the types of foods children ask for at home. In an area such as Wigan with pockets of significant deprivation, this influence may extend to the food consumed by the whole family. This may contribute to some of the significant problems we are trying to address through Wigan's Local Area Agreement⁴ such as low life expectancy rates and high incidence of mortality from cardiovascular disease in adults. We also have high levels of obesity in Wigan. Nutritious

⁴ Wigan's Local Area Agreement is made up of three blocks; Children & Young People; Healthier Communities & Older People; and Safer & Stronger Communities. More information can be found at www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/performance/laa/

meals in school, and healthy food habits developed in school, will help us to reverse this situation in the coming generations.

But this must be achieved within financial limits. And any increase in expenditure must be carefully funded as significant increases in school meal charges will make it difficult for many parents to afford for their child to have a school meal. This would have a significant negative impact on those vulnerable children we need to target most, such as those just above the threshold for receiving free meals possibly resulting in a widening rather than a narrowing of the health inequality gap. **We must ensure that any improvements to the nutritional content of our school meals are passed on to our most vulnerable children.** School lunches can often be the one chance for some children to have a wholesome hot meal. Despite the increased attention on the standards of meals, issues such as cost, meal take up and especially meal take up amongst those entitled to free school meals are still significant.

Cost per Meal

In 2004/05, the cost of the school meals service in Wigan was £6,483,136. On average, children were charged £1.55 per meal. The average total cost of producing a meal was £1.52. Inflation raised the average charge to £1.60 for 2005/06, with a total production cost of £1.56 per meal.

Comparison with other authorities is provided in the **Compare Section** of this report, starting on page 27.

Spend on food content (ingredient costs per meal)

Based on the 2004/05 primary school menu, 47p was spent on the food content of a primary meal in Wigan. And approximately 60p in high schools. MCCS have recently introduced new primary school menus. The spend on food content has increased to approximately 52p for primary school meals.

The Government's current suggested minima are 50p for primary schools and 60p for secondary schools. So we are meeting these current minimum standards in Wigan. However, within the consultation document, 'Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food'¹, it is suggested that in order to meet the nutritional standards proposed it is expected that ingredient expenditure per meal will need to be 70p in primary schools and 80p in secondary schools. This is a major challenge, especially when the need to increase meal take up and provide nutritional benefits for those most at need is factored in.

Considerable effort has been directed towards reducing labour costs to maximise the amount spent on ingredients. The potential for further increases is limited as all the available indicators point towards increases in costs. An increase in prices to reflect this required increase in expenditure may cause the pupils most

in need of healthier meals to stop using the service. Obviously there are other factors to take into consideration, such as the value for money of the procurement process for meal ingredients that would affect this expenditure. We will discuss this in more detail later.

Comparison with other authorities ingredient spend is given in the **Compare Section** of this report, starting on page 27.

Meal take-up

Within the Governments' consultation document it states that local authorities should aspire for 100% take up of free school meal entitlement and a 10% increase in paid meal take up. This is an extremely challenging target, especially when combined with the need to raise nutritional standards and expenditure on ingredients for meals. There has been a local and national reduction in school meal take up that has coincided with the Jamie Oliver campaign; this compounds this difficulty. But we should be striving to reverse this trend and the recommendations of this Select Committee have been developed to this end. Figure 1 details the take up of meals in Wigan during the 2004/05 academic year.

Figure 1: Meal take-up in Wigan's schools, 2004/05.

Sector	No. pupils on roll	% meal take up	% Free School meal take up
Primary	26,417	38.8	76.7
Secondary	18,083*	47.7*	67.8*
Special Schools	804	64.9	78.5

Source: Metropolitan Catering & Cleaning Services (MCCS), September 2005 & Children & Young People Services, February 2006.

***Does not include St. Mary's RC High School and Wigan Deanery.**

Primary Schools

There were 26,417 primary school pupils on roll in 2004/05. 17% were entitled to free school meals (4,386). In total, **76.7%** of those entitled to a free school meal took up the option.

Of the remaining 20,405 pupils (potential paid market), **31.3%** took a paid meal. **Overall take up of school meals in primary schools was 38.8%.**

High Schools

There were 18,083 high school pupils on roll in the schools whose meals are supplied by MCCS*. 15.7% of those were entitled to free school meals (2,846). In total, **67.8%** of those entitled to a free school meal took up the option.

Of the remaining 15,237 pupils (potential paid market), **43.9%** took a paid meal. **Overall take up of school meals in high schools was 47.7%.**

Special Schools

There were 804 pupils on roll. 44.9% were entitled to free school meals (361). In total, **78.5%** of those entitled to a free school meal took up the option.

Of the remaining 443 pupils (potential paid market), **53.8%** took a paid meal. **Overall take up of school meals in special schools was 64.9%.**

The overall percentage of pupils that took a meal in all schools in Wigan was 42.8% in 2004/05 (not including St. Mary's RC High School and Wigan Deanery High School). If increased standards of nutrition are to have an impact on the health and well being of the children in Wigan **we need to increase the proportion of pupils that take a meal.** This can prove difficult, especially when potentially cutting out pupil favourites such as chips, chicken drummers and burgers (see Consultation section of this report on page 23). So we need to think of innovative ways of achieving an increase in meal take up, a continued increase in the take up of those most vulnerable (free school meal entitlement) at the same time as increasing the nutritional standards.

There are a number of different initiatives aimed at increasing the take up of school meals. It is certainly an aspiration that better quality, more nutritious meals at a reasonable cost will help. But evidence from the healthy eating initiative in Scotland, 'Hungry for Success', and from Hull City Council's free meals for all scheme, suggests that this is likely to cause an initial drop in take up. But this may be for other reasons, which we shall discuss later. Certainly successful marketing and promotion of the school meals service will have an impact. Through our consultation with school cooks, we found that initiatives such as having food samples at open days and parents' evenings seem to be successful. But effective marketing and promotion is seen as an add-on to the cooks' main role. But the head cooks that we spoke to during this review felt that it required more emphasis. This is reflected in some of the responses we received from our pupil questionnaire (Consult section starting on page 23) as a number of pupils told us that they don't have a school meal because their parents do not want them to. One reason for this could be a lack of awareness or misunderstanding of the quality of meals.

Another option for increasing the take up of school meals is to provide meals for all pupils free of charge. This was one of the key areas of investigation for our review. The section below examines the major areas of investigation in this area and the recommendations of the Select Committee.

Free School Meals

One of the two principal aims of this review was to evaluate the cost and benefits of introducing free school meals to all children in the borough. It was recognised that this could initially mean free school meals for all primary school children, with an option to extend into the secondary sector if this proved successful.

The fundamental questions that we tried to answer on this issue were:

- Has it been done anywhere else?
- What would be the potential cost of such a scheme?
- What would be the benefits in terms of health, attainment and behaviour of children?
- Would it be the most effective method of raising nutrition, educational attainment and behavioural standards for the cost? Or are there alternative options to consider?

We shall take each of these in turn.

Examples of free school meal provision

Hull City Council introduced a three year pilot scheme in 2004 offering free meals to children in primary schools. This included breakfast, lunch, food at after school clubs and fresh fruit. The purpose of this scheme was to address the underachievement and health inequalities that the city faced at that time. Figure 2 outlines the budget estimated in July 2003 for a full year of the scheme in Hull. This was based on meal prices at the time, a 15% take up of breakfast and 70% take up of lunches (which was the original free meal take up at the time in Hull).

Figure 2: Hull City Council's original budget for the free meals scheme (2003)

	Cost (£'s)
Breakfast Clubs	356,000
After school clubs	238,000
Fresh Fruit	712,000
Free Lunches	2,100,000
Total	3,406,000

Source: Hull City Council, Cabinet Report (2 March 2004)

The Select Committee contacted the head of the school meals service in Hull to identify progress with the scheme. A full transcript of these discussions is included in Appendix 1 on page 33. The main issues were:

- There was no government grant for this scheme. The costs were financed primarily from the council tax.

- Free meals were introduced alongside healthier menus. There was an initial drop in meal take up despite them being free. But this has now reversed and total meal take up is 61%, up 11% from 50% prior to the introduction of the scheme. However, despite being free not all children take up the option. **Wigan's primary meal take up in 2004/05 was 38.8%.**
- Hull are experiencing problems getting those eligible for free school meals under the government scheme to register. This may not seem such an issue, as all meals are now free. But free school meal numbers are used in many areas as an indicator to determine funding such as the Additional Educational Need Funding and also by OFSTED in the Performance and Assessment report which benchmarks schools against similar schools based on free school meals. Hull is looking to add an additional question to the benefits application form to improve this situation. **We already have this question on the benefits application form in Wigan.**
- In order to offer free school meals to all, Hull had to apply for special approval from the Secretary of State for Education.

Benefits of the 'free school meals for all' scheme

Part of the proposal to the Secretary of State for Education to enable Hull to provide free meals to all primary pupils, was the need for a full evaluation of the scheme. Hull's scheme was a three year pilot scheme with the potential to extend to secondary schools if successful. Hull University are carrying out this evaluation of the scheme. At the time of writing this report, the first detailed evaluation of the scheme to date is due. However, in the absence of this the Select Committee has been unable to find any other sound evidence that providing free meals to all will improve overall health, attainment and behaviour of children by significantly increasing meal take up.

There is a lack of local knowledge of free meal schemes in order for the relevant local agencies to provide a professional opinion on the potential benefits of providing free meals to all in Wigan. Whilst it is acknowledged that better nutrition is extremely positive, the Police, Youth Offending Team and the PCT were unable to give the Select Committee any evidence to support a free school meal for all approach. Any direct or indirect savings on police or health resources brought about by such a scheme cannot therefore be evaluated locally at this stage. Evidence of this nature is needed from the Hull scheme in order to formulate any concrete evaluation.

There is however, well documented evidence linking improved nutrition with improved behaviour and academic achievement. But these studies tend to focus on children with learning and behavioural disabilities and therefore cannot be directly applied to all. However, it is acknowledged in health and academic

groups that there is a correlation between poor nutrition and poor levels of attainment, behaviour and health.

So increasing the nutritional content of school meals in Wigan will undoubtedly have a very positive impact on pupils. Especially those most vulnerable children who lack nutrition in their general diets. But in order to have any effect children must eat them! So the key question surrounding the issue of free school meals for all is the extent to which it provides the most cost effective way of increasing meal take up.

Costs of a similar scheme in Wigan

The Select Committee received evidence from the Director of Finance and IT on the potential financial impact of providing free school meals to all pupils in Wigan.

We have produced a series of cost estimates for the different options based on current costs of meals and using an average potential take up of 75%. We also factored in the cost of 100% take up. Figure 3 therefore outlines the potential costs associated with providing free lunches in Wigan schools.

Figure 3: Estimated costs of providing free lunches to primary pupils, and primary and secondary pupils

	Cost per year (£) at 75% take up	Cost per year (£) at 100% take up
Primary	5,872,499	7,415,009
Primary & Secondary	10,631,942	13,424,599

Due to the time available for this review, these costings are based solely on meal costs. They do not take account of any capital costs associated with increased take up, such as storage and cooking facilities. They also don't take account of additional staffing requirements.

If **every child in primary schools** was given a free meal and **they all took it** (at 94.7% attendance level) it would cost £7,415,009. **This would mean an additional £6,229,105 per year** on top of the existing free meal budget (this is the money we currently receive to pay for the children who are eligible for free meals under the government scheme).

If 75% took up the free school meal (current average take up in total of free school meals) it would cost £5,872,499. **This is an additional £4,686,595 per year.**

If **every child in primary and high schools** was given a free meal and **they all took it** (at 94.7% attendance level) it would cost £13,424,599. **This would**

mean an additional £11,612,245 per year on top of the existing free meal budget.

If 75% took up the free school meal (current average take up in total of free school meals) it would cost £10,631,942. **This is an additional £8,819,588 per year.**

So, the cost of providing free school meals to all primary pupils would be significantly greater in Wigan than was originally estimated in Hull (£5.9m compared to £3.4m). And this is comparing just lunch costs in Wigan to the total estimate in Hull, including breakfasts, fruit and after school clubs. This is due to the increase in costs since the 2004 estimate in Hull and the fact that we have approximately 20% more pupils.

What about free fruit?

The estimate cost produced by Hull for the provision of free fruit to all primary pupils was £712,000. Under the Government scheme, free fruit is provided to all children of infant age. So the additional cost in Hull is for junior age children in the primary sector. **We estimate that a similar scheme in Wigan would cost £850,000 per year.** Wigan's Food Policy Officer (a nutritionist from the Primary Care Trust) feels that **extending the offer of free fruit to all children in primary schools would be extremely effective in improving children's health.** The current scheme for infant children is highly regarded and the Food Policy Officer feels that extending this provision in Wigan would be greatly received, and be a more cost effective way of improving the health of our pupils than offering free lunches to all.

How would free lunches, or free fruit be funded?

As we have already outlined, there is no funding available to offer free school meals to all children. The only example of such a scheme is in Hull, and this scheme was funded out of the council tax. In addition, schools are currently funded by a mix of council tax and central government grants. But from next year schools will be funded entirely by grants. So, a decision by the council to provide free school meals would have to be financed directly from Council Tax.

The Director of Finance & IT informed the Select Committee that **an annual cost of about £5 million to provide free meals to just primary school children would result in an increase of 4.5% on the council tax. Providing free meals to both primary and secondary school pupils would equate to an approximate increase of 8%.**

Other financial pressures

There are other financial pressures that must be taken into account before a decision can be made on free school meals. As we have outlined, MCCS provide the majority of school meals in Wigan. And MCCS are operating on a tight financial surplus. Any major increases in costs could wipe out this surplus and lead to major difficulties for the business. And there are potential risks on the horizon.

The council is currently going through a job evaluation. With all jobs being evaluated in order to develop a new pay and grading structure. One of the fundamental driving forces behind implementing this is to address issues of equal pay. Jobs such as cooks and cleaners are traditionally occupied by females (who in the past have been paid less than their male colleagues) and so it is likely that the job evaluation will lead to increase staffing costs for MCCS.

In addition to this, the push to improve the nutritional standards of school meals is likely to result in the need for more labour. Either increased hours for existing employees in school kitchens, additional employees or both. This will be required, as there will be more emphasis on freshly prepared meals.

All these issues add up to increased costs for the service which will erode the existing surplus. We must be wary of these increased costs being directly covered by the customers as any significant increase in charges is likely to lead to those most in need of a school meal no longer being able to afford one.

In reviewing the available evidence, **the Select Committee feels that there is not sufficient evidence to support the provision of free school meals for all**. The one example of such a scheme hasn't yet evaluated the benefits of total free meal provision. We cannot evidence that the significant costs associated would be a cost effective way of maximising take up and gaining the most benefits from more nutritious meals. Such provision could also lead to us subsidising those who have an ability to pay for a school meal rather than focusing on the need to increase take up amongst those without the ability to pay.

So what other options do we have?

One option that was brought up during this investigation was the issue of **subsidising school meals**. School meals are already subsidised in some local authority areas, but not in Wigan. Subsidy occurs when the prices charged per meal do not cover the whole cost of producing a meal. In Greenwich for example, the average charge for a meal in 2004/05 was £1.40 although the cost to produce a meal was £1.73. So there was a 33p subsidy on every meal.

As we have already noted, it is likely that one outcome of the government's consultation document will be to impose minimum ingredient only costs of 60p in

primary schools and 70p in secondary schools. Attached to this drive to improve the nutrition of school meals is limited funding. The government is providing £220 million over the next three years to help local authorities and schools to meet the standards. This money is distributed through two new funding grants; one paid to the local authority, and one paid through the Standards Fund for schools.

The **funding to local authorities** is ring fenced and is distributed on the basis of a combination of full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil numbers and numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals. This resulted in **an allocation of £185,904 to Wigan Council** this year and for the next two years. If all of this additional money was used to increase the spend on ingredients, there would be a significant shortfall. Additional funding would still be required.

However, there may be scope for schools to contribute. In addition to the £185,904 to Wigan council over the next three years, **Wigan schools will also receive funding through the Standards Fund**. For maintained schools the grant will be paid to the authority who will distribute it to schools on the basis of a lump sum for each school plus 50p per FTE pupil. For primary and special schools and Pupil Referral Units the lump sum is £1,070. For secondary schools the lump sum is £1,500 per school. Like all school grants this **will not be ring fenced at school level**. Based on the number of schools in Wigan and the pupil numbers for 2004/05, **this additional funding will total around £180,000**. The Select Committee is concerned that this additional funding may be used in some instances on other things besides contributing to increased nutrition as it isn't ring fenced at school level. It is recommended that the LEA encourage schools to return this funding so that it can be linked with the funding given to the local authority. This will enable health professionals, alongside officers from MCCS with significant experience in the school meal industry, to use this additional funding to best effect in a co-ordinated way on a borough wide basis. **The Select Committee recommends that we then spend the predominant amount of this pooled money on food only costs** for the 3 year period of the funding.

If we were successful, how far would it take us?

There are approximately 21,000 meals produced each school day in Wigan (total of primary, secondary and special schools) with a total of 190 feeding days. So the full £365,904 would equate to an extra 9p per meal. This would take the ingredient spend in Wigan to almost 61p for primary meals and 69p for secondary meals. We recognise that there are additional costs to be covered by this funding (some of which are unavoidable) which means that it isn't possible to use the full £365,904. But any reduction in this figure reduces our ability to 'balance the books'.

If we are unable to pool the two sources of additional funding and just use the £185,904 given to the local authority it would result in an increase of just 4p per meal. In order to meet the proposed minimum standards without increasing charges **we would require an additional £175,110 per year in subsidy**. This equates to approximately £39,900 in subsidy per 1p increase in ingredient cost per meal.

The Select Committee recommends that the LEA encourages schools to return their element of the funding. And that this is linked to the local authority funding with the predominant amount spent on ingredients. This would enable the council to provide pupils with enhanced nutrition at a more acceptable cost. This should minimise the numbers of children, especially those most vulnerable just above the threshold for free meals, who could potentially be priced out of a school lunch due to improvements in the standard of nutrition. At the end of the three-year funding period we will need to assess the impact on meal take up and evaluate the need to subsidise meals to the same level. Current costs and meal take up suggest that subsidy would then equate to £39,900 per 1p increase in ingredient spend.

If we don't pool this funding it is unlikely that we can meet the government's proposed minimum spend on ingredients without significantly increasing charges to customers.

Recommendations:

- **That the Council does not introduce a free school meal scheme in Wigan's primary schools at this time. This is due to the significant cost, and the current lack of strong evidence linking such a scheme to improved health, attainment and behaviour. (Recommendation 1)**
- **That the LEA encourages schools to return the additional funding for increased nutritional standards to the authority. This should then be linked with the separate funding given to the local authority to enable a co-ordinated effort to provide increasingly nutritious meals. The predominant amount of this pooled money should be spent on ingredient costs. (Recommendation 2).**

Nutritional standards

It is a certainty that nutritious school meals are of significant benefit to the pupils that eat them. The Jamie Oliver television series highlighted some shocking examples of school meals in this country. This may or may not have contributed to the government's decision to issue a consultation document¹, together with funding, to increase the nutritional standards of school meals. The

recommendations proposed through the consultation document will inevitably lead to improved nutrition. In order to avoid a plethora of extra recommendations on this subject, we have concentrated on the practical implementation of these proposed recommendations.

Whilst market pressures and customer expectations had led to the availability of processed foods in Wigan schools, the extremes portrayed by Jamie Oliver were not representative of the situation in Wigan. The Select Committee was delighted to discover during this review, that many of the processed 'fun' foods had been removed from menus in Wigan by M CCS. And that the management of M CCS were committed to removing the small remaining number in the near future. In fact, during this review new primary menus were developed that were well on the way to meeting the proposed national standards that we should be aiming for by 2008 at the latest.

But there are challenges. The work to increase meal take up, especially for those entitled to free meals, has led to capacity issues in some secondary schools. This has dictated a need for a fast food style approach in order to provide all customers with a meal during the lunch break. But changes have already occurred to improve this situation, such as the replacement of fizzy pops from the lunch counters with water, fruit and milk based drinks.

The two key witnesses that the Select Committee received evidence from on this issue were the Food Policy Officer from the PCT and the Strategic Manager for M CCS. The Food Policy Officer is a nutritionist from the PCT who works, on a part time basis, advising M CCS on the nutritional content of the school meals in Wigan and with schools on the healthy eating agenda.

The Food Policy Officer has been working with M CCS on the new primary school menu so that the proposed nutritional standards can be achieved as early as possible. It is intended that nutritional standards in Wigan's primary schools will be at the national standard for the 2006/07 academic year. The government is proposing to set a limit of 2008.

The evidence received on the nutritional standards of meals in Wigan indicated that we are in a strong position. The work that has gone on in collaboration between M CCS, schools and the PCT means that the proposed national standards will be achievable (depending on availability of funds). But there are significant issues that concerned the select committee regarding the achievement of national nutritional standards. The main issues identified through the discussions with the Food Policy Officer and Strategic Manager for M CCS were:

- **The length of school lunch times**

Whilst recognising the timetable pressures experienced by schools, we are concerned that the school lunch time is being gradually shortened and in some

cases moved to inappropriate times of the day. Shortened lunch times make it difficult to serve all children with a hot freshly prepared meal and may also influence the choices pupils make at lunch time. In many cases children have 45 minutes to eat lunch, take part in any extra curricular activities or simply exercise in the school playground.

We also received evidence of a school in Wigan scheduling the lunch break for 1pm. After lunch, pupils have a one hour period before finishing for the day. Again we are concerned by this approach and feel that it is not the environment in which to encourage children to eat a nutritious meal.

We therefore recommend that schools and their governing bodies should aim for a minimum of one hour for lunch breaks in all schools. And that the lunch break should start on or before 12.30pm. However, it is essential that this be done in conjunction with the point below. If pupils continue to leave school premises but lunch breaks are extended this may compound an already less than ideal situation.

- **Allowing pupils to leave the school premises during the lunch break**

We learnt that certain secondary schools in the borough allow pupils to leave school premises during the lunch break. If we are to increase nutritional standards for the benefit of pupils' health, we feel it is counter-productive to allow children off site for lunch. The difficulties of removing certain items off menus will be compounded by giving children the choice to buy their lunch at local shops, fast food restaurants and so on.

However, the schools in question do have concerns over the physical capacity needed to keep children in school and provide them with a lunch. We recommend that schools do not allow pupils off site during the lunch break. But that MCCS work with the schools that have capacity issues to identify ways of maximising the available space and time (such as having staggered lunch breaks).

- **Kitchen Facilities**

Twenty of our primary schools do not have adequate kitchen facilities to prepare and cook fresh meals on site. Five of these have had special equipment installed to allow pre-prepared food to be finished in school. The remaining fifteen do not have the facilities or space to cook on site without potentially major development work. This may impact on our ability to meet nutritional standards in these schools. The Select Committee recommends that a detailed school kitchen and dining area facilities study is carried out. This will help to prioritise improvements where required.

- **Cost effectiveness of a free meals for all approach**

The Food Policy Officer advised the Select Committee that providing free meals for all may not be the best method of increasing meal uptake and the nutritional

intake of children. The Food Policy Officer felt that Hull's experience highlighted the fact that parental choice is extremely important. Without the necessary investment in marketing and education, free meals for all may be seen by some parents as a way of taking away some of their choice and result in lower than anticipated take up of the scheme. The fact that Hull's primary meal take up is around 60%, despite being free to all, suggests that it has not been a major success for the cost involved.

The Food Policy Officer also stressed the need to investigate subsidising school meals rather than just the potential for free meals for all. This approach would allow pupils to enjoy better, more nutritional meals without paying significantly more. Recommendation 2 proposes a practical and affordable method for doing this.

- **Free fruit**

Under the current government scheme, all infant age children receive a free piece of fruit a day. The Food Policy Officer felt that the best way to spend any increased investment in school food would be to extend this free fruit provision to all children in primary schools (see page 16 for potential costs of this scheme). This initiative would reach all children, irrespective of whether they have a school lunch or not. The Food Policy Officer felt that the infant age scheme had been a major success and that extending this scheme, alongside the existing plans to improve the nutritional content of meals, would be the most effective way of improving nutrition through food in schools.

Recommendations:

- **Schools and their governing bodies should aim for a minimum of one hour for lunch breaks in all schools, starting no later than 12.30pm. (Recommendation 4)**
- **MCCS should support schools who feel that they don't have the necessary space to accommodate all children at lunch without allowing children off site. Where possible, practical solutions such as staggered lunch breaks should be identified. (Recommendation 5)**
- **A detailed school kitchen and dining area facilities study should be carried out by MCCS before the start of the 2006/07 academic year. (Recommendation 6)**
- **The provision of free fruit to all primary pupils should be re-evaluated, based on the impact of recommendation 2, prior to the end of the three-year funding period. (Recommendation 3)**

Consult

This section of the report details the main findings of the Select Committee gathered through consultation. Due to the nature of this piece of research, most evidence was collated through desktop research, financial costing exercises and interviews with key professional witnesses.

But we did consult with three groups; children, head teachers and head cooks in schools.

Children

We developed a questionnaire for primary and secondary schools so that we could learn more about our children's attitudes to food and the choices that they make. **The primary school questionnaire** was issued to two schools; one of the higher performing schools in Wigan and one of our lower performing schools. A questionnaire was given to all children of junior age within those schools. Unfortunately, due to other pressures only one of these schools were able to complete the questionnaire.

Appendix 2 is an annotated questionnaire that details all the results. In summary, 250 questionnaires were distributed and we received 204 completed questionnaires; a response rate of 82%. 51% of the respondents were boys and 49% girls.

Quite surprisingly, 73% of the pupils that responded said that they didn't have a school dinner. The most popular reason for this (64%) was because they bring their lunch from home. And 23% said it was because their parents didn't want them to have a school dinner. This emphasises the importance of promotion and publicity (recommendation 8).

The pupils that responded showed a good understanding of health and nutrition when asked to identify healthy food items from a list. And 62% felt that there **was enough healthy food available for lunch at school.**

We issued the **secondary school questionnaire** to two of our secondary schools. Again we used a higher performing and a lower performing school. A questionnaire was given to all pupils in those schools in Year 9. Again, only one of these schools were able to take the questionnaires.

The annotated questionnaire with all results is also included in Appendix 2. 250 questionnaires were distributed and we received 217 responses; a response rate of 87%. 53% of the respondents were male and 47% were female. More than half of the pupils (52%) indicated that they buy snacks from the canteen

regularly. 12% of those that responded never buy snacks. We were delighted to find that the most popular 'snack' purchased was water (34%), although crisps and chocolate / sweets were also popular choices.

43% of the pupils that responded bought a school lunch every day, which is much closer to the borough average than in the primary sample. 28% never buy a school lunch and the three most popular things that would encourage them to were more choice, cheaper food and more time to eat.

The responses to the question on the availability of healthy foods in schools were completely different to those received from the primary school questionnaire. 61% of the pupils who responded **did not feel that there are enough healthy options on the school lunch menu.**

Head Teachers

During the review we attempted to contact a number of local head teachers to obtain their views and debate some of the issues forming from our work. We only received information from three schools; one primary and two secondary schools. This obviously causes problems in terms of how representative these views are. But the issues that were raised are still important to the review process.

The key issues that emerged from these discussions with schools reinforced the general findings of the review. Each school strongly felt that school meals had and continued to improve but that there was potential to improve further. And each school also made reference to the strong working relationship with MCCS.

One of the secondary schools and the primary school felt that, due to capacity issues and the facilities they have available, some children do not have enough time to eat their lunch. The other secondary school did not see this as a problem at all. This was the bigger of the two schools in terms of pupil numbers, but the two sittings for lunch and facilities on offer are adequate to accommodate these numbers in this school. This emphasised the need for a detailed facilities audit at each school so that these issues can be addressed as far as possible on a prioritised basis (recommendation 7). And that practical options should be considered before the need for significant investment to improve this situation.

One of the schools felt that any additional funding would be better spent on improving facilities rather than the standard of food. This was because of the improvements made in relation to food standards and the need to increase capacity and attractiveness of the facilities.

Head Cooks

We interviewed the head cooks at Ince Rose Bridge High School, Hesketh Fletcher High School and Astley St Stephens CofE Primary School. The purpose of this was to gain a better understanding of the experience at the 'front-line'.

It was evident that all three head cooks were extremely passionate and committed to providing children with a wholesome lunch. And in discussions many examples of 'going the extra mile' were evident. The main issues from all discussions were:

- All the Head Cooks felt that the children had an increasingly good attitude to food. And recognised the importance of eating healthily. Initiatives such as 'chip free days' hadn't caused too many problems and neither had the withdrawal of certain food items.
- From their daily observation of children in the school canteen, the cooks in the high schools felt that there was no longer any stigma attached to being on free school lunches. However this wasn't the case in the primary school.
- All were satisfied with their level of training. But it was raised that an important part of the job should be seen as marketing the benefits of having a school meal. All the cooks attended open evenings but it was seen as an additional role that in some instances was done in their own time. There was no stipulation to carry out any form of marketing.
- Shorter lunch times did prove problematic. Especially in primary schools when the hall is often needed for class immediately after lunch. This puts pressure on kitchen staff and makes it difficult to serve all pupils without rushing those at the end to some degree.
- One of the schools has a late lunch as the head feels that after lunch it is difficult to motivate pupils to learn. This concerned the Select Committee as all available evidence suggests that the move to more nutritious menus should improve this dramatically. A late lunch break will not act as an incentive for children to try the healthier menus as they can choose from the local shops and fast food restaurants an hour after the lunch break when they go home.
- One of the schools allows children out of school for lunch. This was a recent decision, taken due to lack of space to feed children in the allocated lunch period. Again this caused concern as an option to go off site for lunch will have a negative impact on the take up of the healthier foods on offer in school.

Recommendations:

- **Schools and their governing bodies should aim for a minimum of one hour for lunch breaks in all schools, starting no later than 12.30pm. (Recommendation 4)**
- **MCCS should support schools who feel that they don't have the necessary space to accommodate all children at lunch without allowing children off site. Where possible, practical solutions such as staggered lunch breaks should be identified. (Recommendation 5)**
- **School cooks should be encouraged to, and supported in, marketing and promoting their service in school. MCCS should facilitate this change. (Recommendation 7)**
- **School cooks should be encouraged to, and supported in, marketing and promoting their service in school. MCCS should facilitate this change. (Recommendation 8)**

Compare

This section of the report allows us to compare a number of school meals related information in Wigan with other areas.

For the purpose of this review we identified the following items that we needed to compare ourselves against:

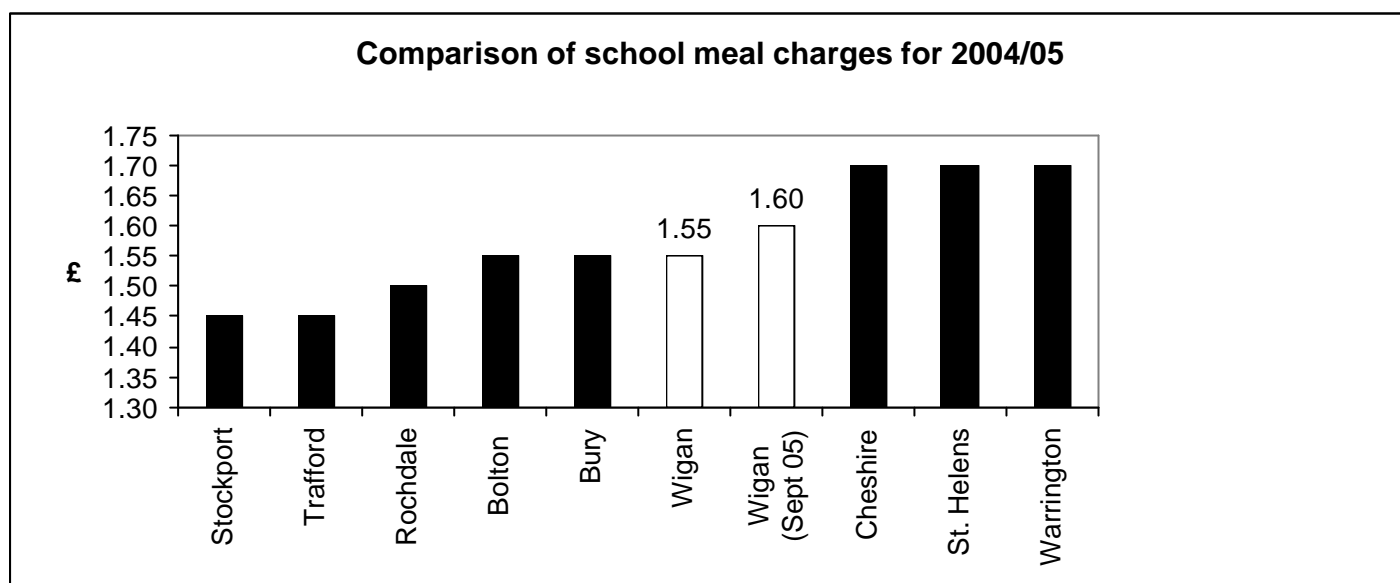
- The total cost of the school meals service
- The price charged for a school meal
- The value of the food content of an average meal (amount spent on ingredients)
- The take up of free school meals
- The total take up of meals

Wigan's data for the purposes of this comparison does not include those schools (St. Mary's RC High School and Wigan Deanery) that use an alternative provider. The amount of information available relating to school meals differed quite considerably across local authorities. **We support the recommendation in the government's consultation document¹ for regular national data sharing in this area to aid future comparative work.**

Prices charged for school meals

Graph 1 compares the average charge for a school meal in Wigan to charges in other neighbouring authorities.

Graph 1 (Please note that the y-axis scale starts at £1.30 not £0).



Source: Metropolitan Catering & Cleaning Services (MCCS), September 2005.

Wigan charged the same as Bolton and Bury in 2004/05 (£1.55). This was less than Cheshire, St. Helens and Warrington and more than Stockport, Trafford and Rochdale. **However**, we don't know the subsidy levels that exist at these authorities. If meals are subsidised, they are charged at a price less than the total cost to produce them. We know that this is the case at Greenwich who charge £1.40 per meal although the cost is £1.73 (33p subsidy). We do not subsidise meals in Wigan.

Spend on food content per meal

Based on the 2004/05 primary school menu, 47p was spent on the food content of a primary meal in Wigan. And approximately 60p in high schools. MCCS have recently introduced new primary school menus. The spend on food content has increased to approximately 52p for primary school meals.

Within its consultation document¹ the government indicates a proposed standard of 60p spend on the food content of a primary meal and 70p for a secondary school meal. Our research shows that some authorities are spending as little as 37p on the food content of school meals (Rotherham, Redcar and Cleveland, Birmingham and Stockton-on-Tees). The London Boroughs of Kensington and

Chelsea (65p) and Wandsworth (70p) spend considerably more although both charge £1.85 per meal. The highest spend is the Isles of Scilly at 90p - they charge £1.75 per meal. (Source: www.bbc.co.uk).

So, based on this research, our spend on ingredient costs isn't the highest, but certainly not the lowest. The major problem with this data however is that it doesn't take account of how much value for money is gained from the method of procuring ingredient for meals. A strictly cost only method is not the most robust way of comparing the quality of ingredients. **The Select Committee recommends that we develop a value for money indicator of meal content based on the cost and nutritional value of ingredients. We should propose that the government adopt this method of measurement.**

The Select Committee received a set of comparative performance data from APSE (Association of Public Service Excellence). This data compares Wigan to a group of similar authorities on a range of indicators. Due to its comparative nature, the most recent data set is 2003/04. It does however give us an indication of how Wigan's school meals compares to other similar authorities.

Figure 4: APSE data where Wigan is better than average (2003/04)

Indicator	Wigan actual	APSE group average	APSE group best quartile (2002/03)
% Paid Meal Take Up (secondary schools)	42.6	42	54
% Free Meal Take Up (secondary schools)	68	61	67
% Free Meal Take Up (special schools)	80.4	75	87
Cash Income per Paying Pupil (secondary)	£0.77	£0.70	£0.72
% Food Only Cost Ratio (secondary schools)	49.17	41.39	N/A

Source: APSE Performance Networks, Education Catering Services' Performance Report 2003/04

In 2003/04 Wigan's meal take up in the secondary sector was better than average for the family group. And a higher than average proportion of the total cost of a secondary school meal was spent on ingredient costs.

Figure 5: APSE data where Wigan's performance was below average (2003/04)

Indicator	Wigan actual	APSE group average	APSE group best quartile (2002/03)
Total Cost per Meal	£1.67	£1.66	£1.33
Price of a Primary School Meal (junior age)	£1.47	£1.43	N/A
Price of a Primary School Meal (infant age)	£1.47	£1.42	N/A
*Subsidy per Meal (excluding free meals)	-£0.02	£0.15	N/A
Food Only Cost per Meal (primary / special schools)	£0.44	£0.46	£0.37
% Paid Meal Take Up (all schools)	36.7	41	45
% Free Meal Take Up (all schools)	73.1	75	78

Source: APSE Performance Networks, Education Catering Services' Performance Report 2003/04

***Subsidy level included in Figure 5 only because Wigan's subsidy is lower than the average. There is no definitive 'better' or 'worse' for this indicator.**

Wigan's total cost was marginally more than average for the family group in 2003/04. And our prices charged in primary schools were greater than average. Our ingredient costs in primary and special schools were lower than average although as we have noted, this does not indicate value for money. And our total meal take up for all schools was below the average. We don't have the 2004/05 data for comparison, but we do know that Wigan's food only costs in primary schools has increased by eight pence to £0.52. The total take up of free meals has increased by 2.5% to 75.6%. And take up of paid meals in all schools was 38.2% in 2004/05, an increase of 1.5%.

If the majority of our pupils are to benefit from improved, healthier meals we must increase the take up of free and paid meals and not pass on any significant price increases to our customers. In 2003/04 our take up was slightly below average compared to similar authorities, but our prices in primary schools were greater than the average. This is the main challenge for the school meals services in Wigan.

Recommendations:

- That the LEA encourages schools to return the additional funding for increased nutritional standards to the authority. This should then be linked with the separate funding given to the local authority to enable a co-ordinated effort to provide increasingly nutritious meals. The predominant amount of this pooled money should be spent on ingredient costs. (Recommendation 2).

Conclusions & Recommendations

The purpose of this investigation by the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee was to:

- Assess the feasibility of providing free school meals for all children in the borough.
- Examine the nutritional standards of school meals in Wigan and how they compare to the proposed national standards for nutrition.

The outcome of this investigation is a set of eight key recommendations. These are listed in full below.

During the process of this review it has been clear that those working towards improving school meals in Wigan are passionate and dedicated to the cause. There are areas for improvement, as identified during the review that will require the same commitment if continued improvement is to be achieved.

The key outcome of this review is to recommend that the council does not pursue the option of providing free school meals to all children. Instead, we recommend that efforts be made to pool the additional funding allocated to the council and our schools. And that the predominant amount of this money is spent on ingredients of meals whilst minimising the financial impact on customers.

- 1. That the Council does not introduce a free school meal scheme for every child in Wigan's primary schools at this time. We have explored the available evidence and evaluated the potential benefits and costs of such a scheme. Due to the significant cost, and the current lack of strong evidence linking such a scheme to improved health, attainment and behaviour we could not support the introduction of free meals.**
- 2. That the LEA encourages schools to return the additional funding for increased nutritional standards to the authority. This should then be linked with the separate funding given to the local authority to enable a co-ordinated effort to provide increasingly nutritious meals. The predominant amount of this pooled money should be spent on ingredient costs.**
- 3. Consideration has been given to providing a free piece of fruit to all primary pupils each day. This would extend the current provision from just infant age children to all primary school children. We feel that this scheme would be beneficial, but that priority should be given to recommendation 2. The provision of free fruit to all primary**

pupils should be re-evaluated, based on the impact of recommendation 2, prior to the end of the three-year funding period.

- 4. Schools, and their governing bodies should aim for a minimum of one hour for lunch breaks in all schools, starting no later than 12.30pm.**
- 5. MCCS should support schools who feel that they don't have the necessary space to accommodate all children at lunch without allowing children off site. Where possible, practical solutions such as staggered lunch breaks should be identified.**
- 6. The Select Committee recommends that we develop a value for money indicator of meal content based on the cost and nutritional value of ingredients. We should propose that the government adopt this method of measurement.**
- 7. A detailed school kitchen and dining area facilities study should be carried out by MCCS before the start of the 2006/07 academic year. Facilities for school meals should be a priority for all new schools built in the future.**
- 8. School cooks should be encouraged to, and supported in, marketing and promoting their service in school. MCCS should facilitate this change.**

Appendix 1: Transcript of discussions with Hull City Council

Q. Was the free school meals initiative funded from the sale of Hull's telecommunications?

A. Much of that money was already spent by the time the project was actioned. Therefore the funding was taken from elsewhere within the Council's budget.

Q. How are the school meals for primary pupils funded?

A. No government funding. Project financed from the Council Tax income.

No extra allowance made in the Council Tax to subsidise the free meal project for primary schools.

Does this only apply to primary lunches?

A. No, it also covers primary pupils breakfast, mid-morning break service and after school clubs. Free meals for high school pupils being considered.

Q. What is the current take up on meals in primary schools? How does this compare to before the free meals were introduced?

A. Current take up 61%. Was 50% prior for free and paid meals.

Q. How many pupils on role?

A. 28,000 in the primary sector.

Q. If take up has increased, have you had to carry out any improvement work to kitchens, storage, refrigeration and so on?

A. None as yet. Likely to cause problems when we reach a 70% uptake. Present rolling programme for replacement of refrigeration as normal style of cooking changed with new menus, so fryers being replaced with ovens.

Q. Has there been an increase in uptake of meals from pupils previously entitled to free meals under the standard Government scheme?

A. Can't be quantified. Major problems getting entitled families to apply when meals are free anyway.

Q. What is Hull's position with the Healthy Living Agenda and new healthy menus for primary schools?

A. Like a lot of authorities, we've taken off a large number of processed and fun foods and promoted healthier options. But we've seen a drop of approximately 11% in take up. Many pupils, parents and even councillors have rung in to see if some items can be put back on menus.

Q. Have pupils had any input into the content of healthy menus?

A. Some input. Many pupils not happy with the changes to healthier menus. Constant requests for the return to convenience foods e.g. fish fingers, burgers etc.

Q. Any other issues we need to be aware of?

A. There were a number of legal issues around introducing 'free meals for all'. The Council had to apply to the Secretary of State to overcome the law with reference to giving free meals. Also, it applies to offering meals at non-economical prices.

Appendix 2: Annotated primary school questionnaire



Q1 Are you:
 A boy..... 51% A girl..... 49%

Q2 What school do you go to?

100%

Q3 Do you have a school dinner?
 Yes..... 27% No 73%

Q4 If no, why do you not have a school dinner?

My parents don't want me to have a school dinner 21%

There is not enough time to eat a school dinner 6%

My friends don't have a school dinner 19%

I don't like the food 23%

The food isn't healthy enough 7%

I like to bring my lunch from home..... 64%

Other:

- Parents wanting to know what children were eating;
- Children didn't want school dinners;
- Children wanted to be with their friends;
- Lack of time, length of queues and cost.

Themes of responses

Q5 What would make you want to have a school dinner?

More choice of food..... 52%

More time to eat..... 21%

Healthier food..... 19%

Other:

- Cheaper costs;
- Friends having school dinner;
- More choice, larger portions.

Themes of responses

Q6 Tick the foods and drinks that you think are healthy?

Milk, water	96%
Pizza.....	6%
Chips.....	8%
Brown bread	93%
Apples, bananas, pears, grapes	93%
Roast chicken.....	57%
Nuts, raisins.....	69%
Chicken nuggets.....	17%
Tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, cucumber	94%
Orange juice	87%
Fish fingers.....	33%
Cake, biscuits	5%
Coke, Pepsi, lemonade	2%
Cheese	70%

Q7 Do you think there is enough healthy food for dinner at school?

Yes.....	62%	No.....	36%
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- Q8 What other things would you like to see on the lunch menu?**
- More types of bread for sandwiches;
 - More fresh fruit;
 - Nuts;
 - Pasta including spaghetti, lasagne;
 - Pizzas;
 - Variety of salads;
 - Roast dinners – beef, lamb, chicken, turkey;
 - No instant mash – mash with real potato;
 - Fish cakes.

- Q9 Do you have any other ideas?**
- The cost of meals should be reduced;
 - The reintroduction of cakes, sweets and fizzy drinks;
 - Generally more choice on the menu; and
 - Better plates, trays and tables

Appendix 3: Annotated secondary school questionnaire

School Meals - High School Questionnaire



Q1 Are you:
 Male.....53% Female47%

Q2 What school do you attend?
 0%

Q3 Do you buy snacks from the school canteen?
 More than once a day.....10% Hardly ever.....36%
 Once a day.....27% Never.....12%
 Twice a week.....15%

Q4 If yes, what do you buy?
 Fruit juice.....13% Chocolate / sweets.....29%
 Water.....34% Crisps.....30%
 Fizzy drinks.....12% Cake.....18%
 Fruit.....3%
 Something else, please specify:

- Cookies
- Sandwiches / toasted sandwiches

Q5 How often do you buy your lunch in the school canteen?
 1-2 times each week.....14%
 2-4 times each week.....14%
 Every day.....43%
 Never.....28%

Q6 If never, why do you not buy your lunch in the canteen?
 No time.....3%
 Don't like the menu.....6%
 Not enough healthy food.....8%
 My friends don't eat a canteen lunch.....7%
 Not enough places to sit.....4%
 Bring lunch from home.....13%
 Another reason

- Go home / out of school for lunch
- Poor hygiene standards in canteen
- Cost too much
- Not enough healthy options
- Queues too long / not enough time to eat

Q7 What would make you want to buy your lunch from the canteen?

More choice on the menu.....	41%
Cheap food.....	38%
More time to eat	34%
Healthier food	29%
Something else	

- Cheaper food
- Better quality / more choice
- more time to eat

Q8 Do you think there are enough healthy options on the school lunch menu?

Yes.....	35%	No.....	61%
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Q9 What sort of things would you like to see on the lunch menu?

- choose own sandwich filling / different types of
- More pasta dishes on menu
- More fruit and vegetables
- More vegetarian choices
- Chips, burgers, etc.
- Fizzy drinks

Q10 Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

- More time to eat
- Larger canteen facilities
- Larger portions
- Better quality of food
- Reduce cost of food
- Longer lunch break
- Bring back fizzy drinks
- Change burger bar to sandwich bar
- Healthier food