
**HEALTH & WELL BEING AND CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES JOINT VISITS TO TASTE SCHOOL MEALS TASK AND FINISH
REVIEW GROUP**

**Responsible Cabinet Members – Councillor Chris McEwan, Children and Young People
Portfolio and Councillor Andy Scott, Health and Leisure Portfolio**

**Responsible Directors – Murray Rose, Director of Children’s Services and Cliff Brown,
Director for Community Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To report the findings and recommendations of Members of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, following joint visits to schools to scrutinise the provision and quality of school meals.

Summary

2. Members of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee extended an open invitation to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, to visit a number of schools to taste school meals.
3. Members of both Scrutiny Committees visited three Primary Schools in the Borough to taste a school meal and to consider current issues in relation to the provision of school meals, with the Schools Meal Catering Manager and schools meals staff.
4. This report summarises the work undertaken, and the findings, and recommendations, of those Members that attended the school visits.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that:
 - (a) the progress of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in respect of the task and finish review established to scrutinise the provision and quality of schools meals, be noted;
 - (b) the comments of the Director of Children’s Services and Director of Community Services, in respect of the review, be noted; and
 - (c) a further report be submitted to a future meeting of Cabinet once the review is complete.
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Paul Wildsmith
Director of Corporate Services

Abbie Anderson
Ex 2365

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has implications to address Health and Well Being for the children and young people of Darlington.
Sustainability	There are no issues relating to Sustainability which this report needs to address.
Diversity	One of the recommendations asks that an alternative menu be explored to include a Halal ('permissible') meat option, taking in consideration demand, financial constraints and local providers.
Wards Affected	This report does not impact on a particular Ward, but Darlington as a whole.
Groups Affected	This report focuses on children and young people in particular.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This links to the Theme 3 "Healthy Darlington". Specifically addressing health inequalities to narrow the gaps in health and well-being and promoting positive healthy eating.
Efficiency	This report does not identify specific efficiency savings.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. Attached as **Appendix 1**, is the final report following the work undertaken by Members of both Health & Well Being Scrutiny Committee and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee following visits three Primary Schools in Darlington, to scrutinise the provision and quality of school meals.
7. The final report has been considered by both Scrutiny Committees.

Recommendations

8. The Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee considered the final report and agreed that the final report of the Health & Well Being and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committees Joint Visits to taste School Meals be considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and then submitted to Cabinet with the following recommendations:-
 - (a) That an alternative menu be explored to include a Halal ('permissible') meat option, taking in consideration demand, financial constraints and local providers.
 - (b) That the pricing of school meals be considered across the town to agree a fixed price for all schools in Darlington.
 - (c) That a uniform approach be taken across the Borough to the nutritional content of packed lunches.
9. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee considered the final report and agreed the recommendations and in addition requested :-

That the Chair of the Health and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee be requested to extend the review to include Secondary and Nursery schools and mechanisms for the payment of school dinners, including free school dinners, and that this Committee continue to be involved in the review.

Director of Community Services Comments

10. Alternative dishes for menus are currently being developed, taking into consideration the demand, financial constraints and availability of "permissible foods" from local providers. In addition to those foods referred to in the report, alternative products such as quorn mince, steaks and chunks are being used creatively in recipes that will appeal to all children. Whilst remaining permissible for ethnic dining, it will also comply fully with the nutritional guidelines as a healthy option.

11. The cost of a school meal to schools using Community Services as their provider will be £1.68 per meal for financial year 2009/10. It is accepted that schools may wish to offset an element of their administration costs by charging a higher fee to parents, however, it is suggested that a charge to parents of £1.70 would represent value for money that will support service take-up and be in line with other local authorities' charges in the region.
12. To assist in achieving a uniform approach to the nutritional content of packed lunches, example guidelines and templates are widely available from the School Food Trust guidelines information packs. It is suggested that this would provide a suitable template for schools to follow.

Director of Children's Services Comments

13. The Director of Children's Services welcomes the work of the joint Task and Finish Group and the interest shown in supporting schools to promote healthy eating and culturally sensitive menus.
14. The recommendations set out in paragraph 8 above should be supported, with the understanding that the recommendation set out in paragraph 8 refers to how the local authority will seek to influence the content of packed lunches. The reason for this note is that the governing bodies of each school will set their own strategic arrangements and policies regarding lunch time arrangements.

HEALTH & WELL BEING AND CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES JOINT VISITS TO TASTE SCHOOL MEALS – FINAL REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To report the findings and recommendations of Members of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, following joint visits to schools to scrutinise the provision and quality of school meals.

Summary

2. Members of the Committee will recall that an open invitation was extended to Members of both the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, to visit a number of schools to taste school meals.
3. Members of both Scrutiny Committees visited three Primary Schools in the Borough to taste a school meal and to consider current issues in relation to the provision of school meals, with the Schools Meal Catering Manager and schools meals staff.
4. This report summarises the work undertaken, and the findings, and recommendations, of those Members that attended the school visits.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended:-
 - (a) That it be noted that the Members of both Scrutiny Committees were very impressed with all the schools visited and quality of the meals provided and tasted.
 - (b) That the nutritional charts displayed within the schools are very much welcomed, and Members are satisfied with the vast amount of work that has been undertaken in preparation meet the new guidelines.
 - (c) That an alternative menu be explored to include a Halal ('permissible') meat option, taking in consideration demand, financial constraints and local providers.
 - (d) That the pricing of school meals be considered across the town to agree a fixed price for all schools in Darlington.
 - (e) That the scrutiny of food and refreshments sold in vending machines in the Council's schools and leisure facilities be added to the Work Programme of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee, with a view to conducting a Review at a future date.

Paul Wildsmith
Director of Corporate Services

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Author: Paul Dalton
Extension 2387

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	This report has implications to address Health and Well Being for the children and young people of Darlington.
Sustainability	There are no issues relating to Sustainability which this report needs to address.
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	This report does not impact on a particular Ward, but Darlington as a whole.
Groups Affected	This report focuses on children and young people in particular.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's Budget or Policy Framework.
Key Decision	This is not a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This links to the Theme 3 "Healthy Darlington". Specifically addressing health inequalities to narrow the gaps in health and well-being and promoting positive healthy eating.

MAIN REPORT

Method of Investigation

- Members met on four occasions between 26th March 2008 and 28th August 2008. This included three visits to Primary Schools in Darlington (Abbey Infant School, Skerne Park Primary School and Corporation Road Community School), and Members held discussions during these meetings with the Schools Meal Catering Manager and School Meals staff. The complete notes of these meetings are appended to this report in **Appendices 1–4**.

Information and Analysis

- Abbey Infant School:** During the visit to Abbey Infant School, Members were encouraged to find that a large proportion of pupils received school meals at this school, however expressed concern in relation to the number of pupils who brought packed lunches. Members were disappointed to find that there was no official criteria or guidance in place to monitor packed lunches, however were extremely pleased to learn that the Head Teacher works hard to discourage parents sending pupils to school with an ‘unhealthy’ packed lunch. Members were informed that this can be an issue in some schools in the Borough.
- Members commended the size of the portions provided to children, and discovered that vegetables were always placed on the meal tray as part of a pupil’s meal. Members also raised concerns in relation to the number of carbohydrates served to pupils, and noted that pupils received bread, pastry and potatoes, however were informed that bread must be served everyday as a requirement of the Nutritional Guidelines.
- Skerne Park Primary School:** Members were impressed with the coloured charts ‘Eat a Rainbow’ displayed in the Dining Hall, and were informed that the school had been awarded the Bronze Award, and that they were close to achieving the Silver Award. Members expressed the wish that this programme could be rolled out across the other Darlington Schools.
- Bowls of salad and bread were placed on every table and Members were pleased to hear that pupils did eat the salad. The School Meal Catering Manager advised that bread buns have been removed from the new menus and that bread would be offered instead. A new recipe book, similar to the one used at Abbey Infants was to be introduced in the September term. The recipe book would demonstrate the standard of presentation expected and provide a uniform approach.
- School Meals Staff at Skerne Park Primary School had created and introduced a range of innovative and healthy soups, which had been offered to the children. Members were pleased to note that these soups were popular with the pupils.
- Sandwiches served were one half white bread and the other half brown bread, which encouraged children to try brown bread.

13. **Corporation Road Community School:** The vegetarian option offered was a fishcake and Members highlighted that some vegetarians would not normally eat fish. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that the vegetarian options were provided based the knowledge of the children's dietary needs at the School, and that the children who were vegetarians at the school do eat fish. Members were reassured to learn that, if approached, the school kitchen would prepare a meal for non-meat / fish eaters and advised that the School Cooks did have a good understanding of the dietary requirements of the children in the School.
14. Despite the school having a large ethnic population, the school did not purchase Halal ('permissible') meat. It was suggested that if Halal meat was offered this may improve demand for school meals.
15. Corporation Road Primary School utilise initiatives such as the 'top table', which is used as an incentive or reward to encourage children to behave appropriately in the Dining Hall and eat all of their school meal.
16. Members were pleased to note that an investment programme was slowly being rolled out to improve kitchen facilities in schools. It was noted that Corporation Road Community School would benefit from some investment to improve efficiencies at serving time.
17. It was reported that waste generated by school meals is composted in the school's garden.
18. **General:** In Darlington, the Council charges schools £1.57 per meal, and the schools subsequently charges parents between £1.60 and £1.75 per school meal. This price is determined by individual Head Teacher. Every school in the Borough adheres to the same menu, which works on a rotation system. Parents of pupil's receive a copy of the menu, and the menu is updated to accommodate seasonal changes.
19. Much of the produce used to prepare school meals in Darlington is provided from local sources, primarily from outlets based in Newcastle and Middlesbrough.
20. The Government introduced new regulations, which updated the 2006 regulations for interim food-based standards for school lunches with effect from September 2007, and implemented the food and nutrient-based standards in September 2008 for Primary Schools, and will introduce the food and nutrient-based standards in Secondary Schools in 2009. Copies of '**A Guide to the Government's new Food-Based Standards for School Lunches**' and '**Guide to the Nutrient-based Standards**' were circulated to Members of each Scrutiny Committee for their information.

Conclusion

21. Members were satisfied with all the schools visited and quality of the meals provided, and impressed with the vast amount of work that had been undertaken in preparation to meet the new guidelines introduced in September 2008.
22. Members did maintain reservations in relation to the non-provision of Halal meat at Corporation Road Community School, and believe that provision of this option should be investigated further.

23. Members also expressed concerns in relation to the disparity in price between schools, and believe that a fixed price should be agreed for all schools in the Borough.
24. Further concerns were expressed regarding food and refreshments sold in vending machines in the Council's schools and leisure facilities, and it was agreed that this be added to the Work Programme of the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee, with a view to conducting a Review at a future date.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE / CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JOINT VISIT TO ABBEY INFANT SCHOOL – TASTING OF SCHOOL MEALS

WEDNESDAY, 26TH MARCH 2008.

Members Present: Councillors Davies, Francis, I. Haszeldine, Long and Swift.

Officers Present: Lynn Wake, Schools Meal Catering Manager and Paul Dalton, Democratic Support Officer.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager introduced herself to the Members, and Members were taken to the School Hall and invited to have a school meal. Members meals were served on plates, however it was pointed out that the children usually receive meals on a ‘small meal tray’, which has separate compartments for different courses.

Members commented on the high quality of the presentation of the food, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that each type of meal is photographed and circulated to the school kitchens, to demonstrate the standard of presentation expected and to provide a uniform approach.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised Members that the school meals were made on the premises and everything, except cod fish fingers, were made from scratch. Members were advised that 55p is spent on food per child per day.

Members enquired where the food used in school meals was provided from. The School Meals Catering Manager advised the following:

- Meat: Manners (Newcastle)
- Fruit and Vegetable: Hollands (Newcastle)
- Bread: Mattison’s (Middlesbrough)
- Milk: Acorn Dairy (Archdeacon Newton)

The Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that, at Abbey Infant School, there was a large take up for school meals, although pupils are allowed to bring packed lunches, and are allowed to bring anything in as part of their packed lunch, which can be a big problem. The Head Teacher at Abbey Infant School successfully works hard to discourage parents sending pupils to school with an ‘unhealthy’ packed lunch, however this can be an issue in some schools.

The Members in attendance commented on the size of the portions provided to children (“they are not mean”). The Schools Meal Catering Manager explained that the Cook in charge of the kitchen determines portion size, and does encourage vegetables be placed on the meal tray as part of each pupil’s dinner. It was also explained that the Unit Manager will examine the amount of waste and advise on portion size based on this.

Councillor Davies advised that Corporation Road Primary School have a 'top table', which comprises a table cloth and good crockery, and pupils are allowed to sit at the top table, with a friend of their choice, as a reward for good behaviour.

Members noted that the pupils at Abbey Infant School raised their hands so that the dinner supervisors could check how much dinner they had eaten before being allowed to proceed to dessert.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager was asked whether advice was provided to parents in relation to the contents of a 'healthy' packed lunch. Members were advised that this did not happen as it was felt more appropriate that resources were used to promote school meals.

Members were informed that no 'seconds' are served.

Discussion ensued on the subject of pupils leaving school premises during a lunch period, with the example of pupils from Hummersknott School and Language College attending Mowden shops. It was highlighted that Hummersknott School and Language College currently had insufficient facilities, however in order to combat this the lunch period would be lengthened in September 2008. It was also highlighted that a second dining hall would soon be provided at Hummersknott School and Language College, serving hot sandwiches, flapjacks, soup, etc. The original dining hall will then be used to serve hot meals only.

A more general discussion took place on whether it was appropriate for pupils to be allowed off the school premises during the lunch period.

Councillor Swift enquired about the number of carbohydrates that were served to the pupils, noting that pupils were receiving Bread, Pastry and Potatoes (3 carbohydrates). It was explained that it was a requirement of the Nutritional Guidelines that bread must be served everyday. Members noted that pupils had the option of both white and brown bread, and wondered if it would be more appropriate for pupils to be served with just brown bread. It was also noted that the bread was not covered in margarine or butter.

Councillor Haszeldine asked if there were any criteria applied for packed lunches. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that there was not, and that the content of packed lunches was not monitored, saying that staff could only encourage, but not impose.

Councillor Haszeldine noted the segregation between those pupils eating school meals and those eating packed lunches. Councillor Haszeldine was advised that the decision in relation to segregation is made by the individual Head Teacher at each school, and that some schools mix their pupils. It was noted that pupils taking a packed lunch at St. Augustine's R.C. Primary School are made to pass the serving hatch, so that pupils can see what is available as school meals.

Discussion ensued on the amount charged for school meals. In Darlington, the schools charge between £1.60 - £1.75, with the Council charging the schools £1.57 per meal.

Councillor Haszeldine enquired how many of the pupils that were entitled to free school meals at Abbey Infant School took this up. The Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that take up was nearly 100% of school meals at Abbey Infant School.

Members then received information in relation to the menu:

- Every school in the Borough adheres to the same menu;
- The menu works on a rotation system;
- The menu is provided to parents;
- The menu is updated to accommodate seasonal changes.

Members were each provided with a copy of the menu.

Pupils are required to give notice if they wish to change from school meals to a packed lunch and visa versa. Pupils can not mix their choices (ie. Unable to have school meal one day and packed lunch the next).

Members were informed that some children ask for the recipes of their school meals for their parents, and schools are thinking of producing a 'cookbook', which can be used to promote healthy school meals and act as fund raiser for schools.

Councillor Haszeldine noted that no salt was provided on the table for pupils.

Discussion ensued on the subject of providing choice to children in relation to school meals, and Members discussed the possibility of not providing choice at Primary level, and introducing choice at Secondary level. Members noted that there was a fine balance to be made in keeping pupils happy.

Members rounded off the visit by discussing the importance of providing balanced diets in schools in deprived areas, the use of cookery demonstrations and tastings during parents evenings, and the promotion of healthy cooking through parenting classes.

Actions as a result of visit:

- Members decided to visit two further Primary Schools, Corporation Road Primary School and Skerne Park Primary School, to compare the experience and the food that they had received at Abbey Infant School with other schools in the Borough.
- Members requested a copy of the Nutritional Guidelines.
- Members expressed an interest in remaining informed of the progress of the school cookbooks proposal.

**HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE / CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**JOINT VISIT TO SKERNE PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL – TASTING OF SCHOOL
MEALS**

TUESDAY, 15TH JULY 2008.

Members Present: Councillors Francis, I. Haszeldine, Hughes, Newall and Swift.

Officers Present: Lynn Wake, Schools Meal Catering Manager and Paul Dalton, Democratic Support Officer.

Upon entering the Dinner Hall, Members noted that background music was played to the children during the lunchtime period.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager highlighted that, contrary to the approach adopted at Abbey Infant School witnessed by Members at their visit on Wednesday, 26th March 2008, the children were served by a dinner supervisor at their table, and therefore did not approach the serving hatch themselves. The children received their dinner on plates and bowls, as opposed to the ‘meal trays’ used at Abbey Infant School.

Councillor Swift commented that she was impressed with the ‘Eat a Rainbow’ poster that was on display in the Dinner Hall, which advised children of what food was healthy for them.

Councillor Newall enquired about the lack of children in the Dinner Hall eating packed lunches, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that those eating packed lunches were in a separate hall.

Members noted that bread had been placed on every table. Councillor Swift expressed concern at the volume of carbohydrates served as her meal also contained pastry and she had also been served a bread roll. It was observed that no salt or pepper had been placed on the table for use by the children, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that salt and pepper were not used in the preparation of the school’s meals. Members observed that salad was placed on every table, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that the children did eat this.

Discussion ensued on the criteria involved in the preparation of school meals. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that changes to the menu, as a result of the new nutrient based standards, which will come into effect from September 2008 in Primary Schools, had been identified and explained that it was a difficult balancing exercise - by adjusting one ingredient in a meal to accommodate one of the revised criteria can have a knock on effect in terms of the remaining criteria. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that she had recently attended the School Meals Conference in Birmingham, and stated that many schools expressed the view that they do not feel that the new guidelines are achievable.

Discussion turned to the uptake of school meals at Skerne Park Primary School, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that this had generally increased. The Schools Meal Catering Manager acknowledged that there had previously been an issue with time allocation for school meals, and that children were going home from school hungry, however this issue had now been resolved.

Both Councillors Swift and Newall commented that the bread buns they had received did not seem as fresh as they would have expected. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised Members that bread was delivered on a daily basis, however after further investigation it transpired that the bread buns had been delivered on Friday (11th July 2008) as part of a consignment intended for use in packed lunches on a school trip. Due to over-ordering the bread buns had subsequently been frozen and defrosted.

Members noted that once the music stopped, the children got louder.

The Schools Meal Catering Officer advised Members that Skerne Park Primary School had achieved the Bronze Award, and were close to obtaining the Silver Award, and that it would be the only school in Darlington that had achieved that.

Members enquired about the numerical comparison between those that stay for school meals, and those that bring a packed lunch into the school, and Members were advised that 187 pupils stay for school meals, with 135 pupils bringing packed lunches in for lunch. Councillor Swift stated that the number of pupils taking school meals tended to go down during the summer months, however the Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that Darlington were currently bucking that trend and the number of pupils opting for school meals had increased by 40%.

Councillor Swift enquired as to whether the school exercised any control over the content of packed lunches, as Abbey Infant School had guidelines on content. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that Skerne Park Primary School did not exercise any control on the content of packed lunches, however did state that Firthmoor Primary School are moving in that direction.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that Skerne Park Primary School do invite parents in on occasions to taste the school meals.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that, from September 2008, sandwiches would not be served as a second choice as they do not meet the new nutrient based standards, and these will be replaced by dishes such as vegetable soup, bread and salad, which meet the new criteria. The Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that Skerne Park Primary School have introduced a variety of new dishes including Red Pepper and Coconut Squash, Apple and Parsnip Soup and Carrot and Coriander Soup.

Councillor Hughes, who spent time sitting with pupils while they ate their school dinner, reported that the children had stated that they 'preferred being served at their tables', that they 'liked the fruit' and that they 'would like serviettes'. Members were informed that the children do have a 'snag group' whereby they are able to express their wishes.

Members discussed the comparison between the use of a plate and bowl, as opposed to the meal tray, and the serving of pudding. Members noted that the pupils at Skerne Park Primary School poured their own water, whereas the pupils at Abbey Infant School had the staff pour the water for them. Members enquired whether the children received further food and drink throughout the day, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that she understood that the children received muffins and milk in the afternoon, however this was arranged by the school and not via the School Meals Service.

Councillor Swift commented that she thought that jacket potatoes were a good addition to the menu and stated that, obviously, they could be served with a variety of fillings, however did reiterate her concerns over the quantity and quality of the bread served, and the nutritional value of the bread provided.

Members were informed that, although the menu was not published on the website yet, it was the intention to make this information available to parents via the Council's website. The website will also include photographs of the meals to display quality and portion size. It is also intended that the recipe book will be available from September 2008.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised Members that all kitchen staff had undergone the appropriate CRB checks.

Discussion ensued on cover in school kitchens during the forthcoming strike action and staff turnover.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that hot puddings are only served 2 or three times a week, and only two fried products are served per week. Members asked who monitors and polices this, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager stated basically it was herself, however she assured Members that everything was done by the book.

Members observed a disabled child being fed by a member of staff, and discussion ensued on the guidance and training provided to ensure that this was done correctly.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE / CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JOINT VISIT TO CORPORATION ROAD COMMUNITY SCHOOL – TASTING OF SCHOOL MEALS

FRIDAY, 18TH JULY 2008.

Members Present: Councillors Davies, Francis, Long and Newall.

Officers Present: Lynn Wake, Schools Meal Catering Manager and Paul Dalton, Democratic Support Officer.

Members were welcomed by Mr. P. King, the Head Teacher, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager, and escorted to the Dining Hall. The Dining Hall was in a separate building behind the school building, however Members noted that it was an old, brick building and commented that the building would get cold in the winter. The Head Teacher stated that a bid for £700,000 funding had been made to redevelop a new sports and dining hall. It is hoped that this funding will allow vastly improved facilities, including a modern serving hatch which would enable greater variety.

Councillor Newall requested the vegetarian option and was provided with a meal that included a fish cake. Councillor Newall stated that as a vegetarian she would not normally eat fish, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager arranged for a salad based dish to be prepared for her. The Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that, if approached, the kitchen would prepare a meal for non-meat / fish eaters, however this would only be prepared on an ad hoc basis, so as not to 'promote pickiness' and increase the amount of food waste.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager introduced Members to the School Cook, and Members asked the School Cook whether she thought that the vegetarian menu provided was sufficient. The School Cook stated that she did feel that the vegetarian menu was sufficient, and highlighted that the kitchen prepared vegetarian gravy.

As the school has a large ethnic population, Members entered into discussion on the use of Halal meat in school meals at the school (for a definition of Halal meat, please see the attached link: www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk/define.html), however were informed by the School Cook that the school was 'not allowed to purchase Halal meat'.

Discussion then ensued on the proportion of children from Muslim backgrounds that stay for school meals. The Head Teacher advised that approximately 20% of children from Muslim backgrounds stay for school meals, however approximately 25%-33% of the children at the school are from Muslim backgrounds. Members speculated as to whether a more tailored menu would encourage greater take up of school meals.

Members commented on the number of kitchen staff, and were advised that the school had proportionally more kitchen staff than it should.

Members were advised that the number of pupils of the overall school population that receive school meals is 50%. Discussion ensued once again on whether a more varied menu would increase the take up of school meals. The Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that many schools would need investment in the school kitchens to provide a more varied selection, as there has been limited investment in kitchen facilities for a number of years. Councillor Long stated that if the Healthy eating Agenda is to be taken seriously then higher quality kitchens and better equipment should be provided for the purpose. The Schools Meal Catering Manager outlined that a number of schools in Darlington would require significant investment in their kitchen facilities (ie. Gurney Pease Primary School), although there are some schools which can cope with a short term increase in workload (Reid Street Primary School can produce a maximum of 450 Christmas school meals).

Members entered into discussion on the small amount of waste produced at the end of the dinner time period, and the composting of food waste for the new garden. Members noted initiatives such as the 'top table' which is used as an incentive to encourage children to eat all of their school dinner. Those that bring packed lunches are monitored on an informal basis, however the Head Teacher does not feel that you can impose the school's will on those parents who chose to provide their children with a packed lunch. Members were informed that this was in direct contrast to High Coniscliffe Primary School, whereby the Head Teacher insists all pupils stay for a school dinner, and therefore they have a 100% take up of school meals).

Members were informed that some parents, who are entitled to receive free school meals for their children, are still opting to provide a packed lunch, however this is not as great a problem as it is at Skerne Park.

The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised Members that, on average, a child attempts to try new food seven times before they accept it, and the Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that she advises Unit Managers to persevere.

Members received information on the Breakfast Club, which is attended by approximately 30 pupils (capacity 34 pupils). Members were informed that the Breakfast Club opens at 8am each day, and costs 50p, for which the children receive toast or crumpet. Unfortunately, the school does not provide an after school club.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE / CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JOINT MEMBERS MEETING FOR THOSE WHO ATTENDED THE SCHOOLS VISITS

THURSDAY, 28TH AUGUST 2008.

Members Present: Councillors Francis, Newall and Swift.

Officers Present: Lynn Wake, Schools Meal Catering Manager and Abbie Metcalfe, Democratic Support Officer.

Apologies received from: The Mayor, Councillors Davies, Hughes and Long.

Councillor Swift in the Chair.

Members summarised the visits they had undertaken and the following points were raised:-

Abbey Infant School

- Members were very impressed with the quality of meal served at the School.
- Notwithstanding the large take up of school meals, Members expressed concerns about the number of the children who brought packed lunches, although, were pleased that the Head Teacher at the School, works successfully works to discourage parents sending pupils to school with 'unhealthy' packed lunches.
- The School Meal Catering Manager informed Members that at High Coniscliffe CE School there was 100% take up of schools meals and that no pupils took packed lunches. This was something that the previous Head Teacher had worked hard to achieve and the new Head Teacher (who has been in post for 2 years) has continued. Members welcomed this and were pleased to note that there had not been any challenges from parents.

Skerne Park Primary School

- Members commented about the fresh quality of the bread buns received during the visit and hoped that staff would learn from this and be more observant about the quality of food they are serving.
- Members were impressed with the coloured charts 'eat a rainbow' displayed in the Dining Hall. The School Meal Catering Manager informed Members that the school had been awarded the Bronze Award and that they were close to achieving the Silver Award, it was hoped that this programme could be rolled out across the other Darlington Schools.
- Members liked the background music playing whilst the children were eating their lunches.
- Members welcomed the bowls of salad and bread being placed on every table and pleased to hear that children did eat the salad. The School Meal Catering Manager advised that bread buns have been removed from the new menus and that bread would be

offered instead. A new recipe book, similar to the one used at Abbey Infants was being introduced in the September term. Where each type of meal is photographed and to demonstrate the standard of presentation expected and to provide a uniform approach.

- Members were impressed by the innovative soups offered to the children and were delighted that children were trying them.
- The School Meal Catering Manager advised that sandwiches served would be one half white bread and the other half brown bread, encouraging children to try brown bread.

Corporation Road Community School

- Members expressed concern that the vegetarian option offered was a fishcake and stated that some vegetarians would not normally eat fish. The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that the vegetarian options were provided based the knowledge of the children's dietary needs at the School, in that the children who were vegetarians at the School do eat fish. The Schools Meal Catering Manager stated that, if approached, the kitchen would prepare a meal for non-meat / fish eaters and advised that the School Cooks did have a good understanding of the dietary requirements of the children in the School.
- It was noted that, as the school has a large ethnic population, there was an issue with the use of Halal meat, in that the school did not purchase Halal meats. It was suggested that if Halal meat was offered this could improve take up of school meals.
- Members welcomed initiatives such as the 'top table' which is used as an incentive to encourage children to eat all of their school dinner.
- The Schools Meal Catering Manager advised that an investment programme was slowly being rolled out to improve kitchen facilities in schools. It was noted that Corporation Road Community School would benefit from some investment to improve efficiencies at serving time.
- Members celebrated the small amount of waste generated from dinner time was composted in the school's garden.

Members entered into a general discussion around pricing of the school meals and how prices varied across the town. The Schools Meal Catering Manager explained that Schools charge between £1.60 - £1.75 and the price was agreed by individual Head Teachers.

Councillor Swift drew Members attention to Councillor Davies' email which she had asked to be taken into account during the discussion. The issue of vending machines was highlighted in Schools and leisure facilities and Councillor Davies suggested that this issue needed to be considered more seriously.

Members were pleased to note that there are plans to rollout a similar healthy eating programme in Secondary Schools, across Darlington.

Members congratulated the Schools Meal Catering Manager for all the positive work her and team have carried out to enhance the school meals served in Darlington Schools.

Recommendations:-

1. That on the whole, Members of the Task and Finish Review Group are very impressed with all the Schools visited and quality of the meals provided and tasted.

2. That the nutritional charts displayed within some Schools are very much welcomed and be rolled out in all Schools.
3. That Members are satisfied with a vast amount of work that has been undertaken in preparation meet the new guidelines.
4. That an alternative menu option be explored to include a halal meat, taking in account take up, financial constraints and local providers and that initial research be undertaken with parents to establish whether it there is a need for such an option.
5. That the pricing of school meals be considered across the town to agree a fixed price for all schools in Darlington.
6. That the Health and Well Being Scrutiny Committee add to its Work Programme the issue of food and refreshments sold in vending machines in the Council's schools and leisure facilities, to scrutinise in the form of a Review in the near future.