

16TH OCTOBER 2007

**REPORT BY DIRECTORS OF EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING AND
TECHNICAL SERVICES**

FREE SCHOOL MEALS (P1-3) PILOT

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To gain approval for the implementation plan for the Free School Meals (Primary 1 – 3) Pilot.**

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In June 2007 the Scottish Government announced the undertaking of a Free School Meal Trial for Primary 1 to Primary 3 (P1-3) pupils. They have approached five Local Authorities to pilot this project and Scottish Borders Council has been selected to be one of these.
- 2.2 The other authorities in the pilot are Glasgow, Fife, East Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire.
- 2.3 To support the pilot, which is to run in all primary schools in the Council between October 2007 and March 2008, a grant of £593,000 has been awarded. This is to cover the costs of the additional free meals to pupils who either previously paid for meals, had packed lunches or went home for lunch. The grant conditions allow for capital expenditure on building, equipment and furniture where this is required.
- 2.4 Within the Scottish Borders the enrolled pupils in P1-3 as at August 2007 is 3,507 pupils with an 287 of these pupils currently eligible for Free School Meals on the income determination basis.
- 2.5 Current indication from the Scottish Government is that they expect the pilots to be up and running by the 29th October 2007.
- 2.6 The current estimated number of total primary meals that will be required on a daily basis during the pilot is approximately 4,800 meals per day. This is a 58% increase on the 2006/07 daily average of 3,039 meals per day. This significant increase in volume is due to the current low level of primary school uptake (versus the Scottish average) in paying pupils. This poses significant challenges for Scottish Borders Council compared with the other pilot authorities, and particularly in some schools where take up is currently

particularly low.

3 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

3.1 The key challenges in delivering Free School Meals for all P1-3 pupils in the by the end of October 2007 are:

a) *Catering Staffing*

To deliver the projected increase in daily meal volume, it is anticipated that an additional 700 hours per week is required in the kitchens through additional hours and new part-time posts.

b) *Dining Room Management*

The increase in pupil numbers and the young age of these pupils will mean that management of the school lunchtime will become more challenging. There is a likelihood that in many of our schools a staggered lunchtime will be required to be adopted. This has implications for the hall usage for curricular activities and potential knock impacts on teaching arrangements.

c) *Dining Room Supervision*

The potential of a lengthened lunchtime and a greater number of young pupils who need support has raised the issue of additional dining room supervision hours for certain schools, this is expected to be an average of one hour per day per school, but will vary significantly from school to school.

d) *Equipment*

The volume of additional meals projected will require an investment in heavy equipment of £48,000 (e.g. catering production equipment), light equipment of £44,000 (e.g. cutlery, plates, beakers) and dining room furniture of £15,000.

e) *Administration*

The increased volume will require a change in process from the current daily collection of meal choices to allow the catering operations staff to procure the quantity of food and minimise waste. This will mean a change to the current administration arrangements to allow weekly information collection from parents across all classes (i.e. not just P1-3).

3.2 Technical Services (TS) and Education & Lifelong Learning (E&LL) officers have been working together since the June announcement on the creation of an implementation plan for this initiative.

3.3 The key elements of the implementation plan are:

- a) Project Management
- b) Communications
- c) Catering Operations
- d) School Operations
- e) School/Catering Linkages
- f) Menu planning
- g) Scottish Government liaison
- h) Information & Evaluation

3.4 A copy of the project plan and risk log is contained in Appendix 1

3.5 PROGRESS TO DATE

3.6 Communication

- a) Prior to the start of the new term, catering staff were brought together for a pre-term workshop which included discussions on the pilot.
- b) During the first week of term an information session for Head teachers and Catering staff was held to allow everyone affected to be briefed on the initiative. At these sessions feedback sheets were issued for individual schools to raise specific issues and challenges.
- c) In the second week of term a letter to all P1-3 parents was issued with the aim of gather more robust information on expected meal uptake during the pilot. This had two objectives, one to raise awareness and one to gather data. Unfortunately the data gathering aspect was not as successful as anticipated but has highlighted the challenges of engaging parents and carers in the project and has influenced the communications approach from herein.
- d) An inter-authority meeting was held by the Scottish Government on the 25th September. This was successful and there was a good dialogue of the issues facing SBC. The meeting further reinforced the particular challenges faced by the significant increase in take-up.

3.7 Catering Operations

- a) **Recruitment of additional Staff**
A major recruitment project has been established within Technical Services with support from Human Resources. The promotion of these vacancies has been via standalone adverts in the local press, 29 slots on Radio Borders, posters and information at Job Centres and advertising via school newsletters/notice boards. Information and Interview days on 13th and 14th of September were used to accelerate the recruitment and selection process. This has been very successful with all but two posts now offered. Follow up action is now in place to ensure successful induction takes place.
- b) **Procurement**
Food: Discussions have been held with all major food suppliers to ensure that they will be able to meet the additional demand including via additional school deliveries.
Heavy & Light Kitchen Equipment: Lists by school have been prepared and costed by the catering managers and orders are currently in the process of being placed. Property Maintenance has been engaged to secure the tradesmen to do any installation activity.
Dining Room Equipment: The feedback sheet from the information session specifically requested comment on the needs in this area and these responses are currently being collated.
- c) **Specific Key Kitchen issues**
Due to practicalities, timing of the implementations will have to be closely monitored and may mean some changes need to be agreed to

the pilot implementation in these schools.

Melrose: Currently E&LL are developing a plan to allow a production kitchen to be delivered during the 07/08 term (part of the existing capital programme) to provide the necessary volumes for the school and relieve pressure on the Langlee production kitchen. Unfortunately it has not been possible to install the new kitchen in time for the project's commencement, however work is being done to see what can be achieved during the next six months in terms of transfer. Contingency plans are being implemented developed to provide the increased meal volumes from Langlee kitchen until the Melrose production kitchen is available.

Heriot: E&LL as part of the Heriot Extension project are installing a production kitchen to replace the current DMS service.

Fountainhall: No current school meal provision at this school, however the new kitchen at Heriot due to be completed before end December 2007, will mean that there is an opportunity to create a Dining Centre at Fountainhall. Work is being identified in relation to the requirements in terms of equipment to allow a delivered meals service to commence as soon as this is available.

St Josephs, Selkirk: No current school meal provision at this school. As with Fountainhall work is ongoing to allow a delivered meals provision via Selkirk High School.

d) **Menu**

The new Autumn/Winter menu went live on the 10th September and will be in place for the entirety of the pilot. The menu is a refinement of previous menus, with the removal of the least popular items.

e) **Scottish Government**

The Scottish Government have completed and gained approval for the parliamentary processes to change the legislation to allow the pilot to be undertaken.

f) **Individual School Action Plans**

A draft plan for each school has been issued with an aim to have these finalised by Friday the 19th October. These are to ensure that Head teachers, school based staff and catering staff are all fully briefed and clear on the requirements and actions to deliver. Meetings are underway with Head teachers in those schools with the most significant challenges.

g) **Administration**

Following discussions have been held with a representative group of school administrators, a revised procedure for administering school meals money, choices and number collection has been identified and is being developed into a detailed proposal. The key change will be to reduce the in class work and to have parents submit weekly choices, and for P4-7 weekly payment for these to improve management of catering and school operations.

h) **Cost Plan**

The cost plan for the pilot has been developed and is attached in Appendix 2.

4 CONSULTATION AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As mentioned above, a cost plan is contained in Appendix 2. The allocation of the expenditure for SBC has been particularly challenging due to the considerable impact of set up/infrastructure costs as a result of increase in take up. In order to make best use of the funds to ensure the pilot is successful, efficiencies have been made in the increased costs of staff due to economies of scale and additional sources of funding for the equipment deficits have been identified.
- 4.2 The plan indicates that the grant award is sufficient to cover all incremental costs of the pilot from a catering perspective and also a significant amount of equipment, and a budget for marketing and lunchtime supervision and the lost income from the sale of meals to Primary 1 -3 paying pupils.
- 4.3 The Scottish Government indicated in their letter of the 29th June 2007, "Clearly, if our estimated costs differ significantly from actual costs as the trials unfold, then we can consider what adjustments are required." There is also a reference to this in the Grant offer letter of the 10th September 2007. In light of the additional anticipated expenditure the intention is to submit this to the Scottish Government for agreement in the December grant claim.
- 4.4 The Heads of Corporate Finance, Financial Administration, Corporate Administration and legal Services are in the process of being consulted and where possible their comments have been included in this report.
- 4.5 Reporting deadlines for this paper have meant that the normal consultation process could not be followed and not all responses had been received at the time of writing and any further comments will be reported at the meeting.

5 RISK COMMENTARY

- 5.1 The key risks to the delivery of this project are set out in the Risk Log in Appendix 1 and are summarised below:
- a) The inability to recruit sufficient staff (Risk1)
 - b) The management of the lunchtime (dining room management, supervision and administration) and the impact on the curriculum in school (Risks 2, 3 and 7)
 - c) That the level of uptake is not as per the current estimate (5 and 6)
 - d) That there are delays in identifying, sourcing and procuring equipment required (Risk 4)
 - e) There is an unanticipated reason for project failure that has not been informed to the Scottish Government. (Risk 8)
- 5.2 In relation to recruitment, the project initiated by Technical Services has successfully mitigated much of this risk however until the induction phase is complete there is a risk the Council is unable to ensure appropriate staff are in post and appropriate employment checks are fully complete in a timely way. It is proposed to start appointments on 15th October to allow for a training period.
- 5.3 In relation to management of the lunchtime, the individual school action plans are the tool in which the solutions will be explored to reduce the impact on other curricular activities. Meetings have been arranged to visit

highest risk schools.

- 5.4 In relation to the level of uptake not being at the predicted level, there is a risk either way in relation to this and the early parental questionnaire was intended to be a key way of mitigating this risk. There will need to be continued consultation and monitoring throughout the pilot in accordance with Scottish Government requirements. In addition, the new menu has been developed to remove the "low uptake days" due to unpopular choices for pupils.
- 5.5 Procurement of equipment is now well underway, with the exception of dining room furniture which is being finalised in more detail with individual schools. This is not seen to be a significant risk, since most schools already accommodate those pupils taking packed lunches.
- 5.6 From discussions with the Scottish Government and other authorities, it is believed that the project is well progressed overall given the timescales involved, however, unanticipated events cannot be mitigated.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 6.1 There is environmental impact of the pilot; however it is a mixed one. In one respect encouraging more school meals reduces packaging in packed lunches, parents travelling to school to collect children for lunch and will improve the healthy eating habits of P1-3. However the pilot will also increase production in our kitchens and potentially increase wastage and utilities usage.

7 EQUALITIES

- 7.1 There are no equalities implications of this pilot as all pupils in P1-3 whatever their circumstances will be eligible for a free school meal.
- 7.2 In addition, consideration is being made to make materials available in other languages.

8 SUMMARY

- 8.1 The Scottish Borders is one of 5 Local Authorities participating in a six month pilot to 31st March 2008 to provide Free School Meals to all Primary 1 – 3 pupils.
- 8.2 Key issues have been identified in relation to staffing, dining room management and equipment.
- 8.3 An implementation plan to deliver the start of 22nd October 2007 has been developed and work on delivering this has commenced.

9 RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Executive endorse this project as set out in the report above and Appendix 1.
- 9.2 That Executive approves the budget set out in Appendix 2.

Approved by

Name	Designation	Signature
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Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference:

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