

**Impact on Catering Services of the introduction of Early Years Meal Pilot****Report by Kevin Anderson, Executive Director - Place****1 Purpose of Report**

To inform Council of the Scottish Government Policies relating to meal provision for Early Years services and imminent changes to school nutritional policy within catering services.

**2 Background**

**2.1** In 2018 the Early Years Team within Education approached Catering Services to provide meals for the new 1140 hour expansion programme and a pilot was established at Mayfield Nursery. The pilot was to provide maximum 40 hot meals for the nursery from the main kitchen at Mayfield/St Luke's school. This started in October 2018.

**2.2** After the successful pilot 7 nurseries received meals from the school kitchens from February 2018 onwards:

- 4 receiving hot meals and 3 packed lunches.
- 3 started in April 18.
- Hot meals were provided from kitchens which had cooking capacity and packed lunches supplied from kitchens with limited capacity in either oven or preparation space.

**2.3** At the start of the new 19/20 school term another 15 nurseries started nursery meal provision and since then Rosewell nursery and Vogrie Outdoor nursery (meals from Newbattle High School) started in October 2019.

This provides at total of 28 school meal kitchens providing meals for Early Years settings. In this financial year to the end of Period 8 (November 8<sup>th</sup> 2019) kitchens have produced a total of 40,057 meals in addition to the school meals normally provided. These are fully funded by Scottish Government grant to Midlothian Early Years pilot project.

**3 Report Implications****3.1 Resource**

In collaboration with the Early Years team a new nursery catering assistant post was developed to balance the meal provision needs for the catering and nursery teams. These posts are funded for 1 year

fixed term by the Early Years project and are subject to evaluation in the pilot phase. 16 part time grade 1 posts were identified as being required for the project (equivalent of 7.1 FTE sessional).

Nursery meals have also been based in 3 High School kitchens to offset the unpredictable meal numbers in those locations due to competition from outside retailers, thereby maximising the resource capacity available.

Equipment required for transporting meals from kitchens to nursery have been funded by the Early Years project (thermal boxes and tins). Meals for Early Years are recommended to be served in the nursery environment.

The food and associated costs for meals (cleaning products etc.) are also met by the Early Years funding. The menu is selected to provide the same items as the primary menu to reduce cost and utilise the resources in the kitchen effectively.

### 3.2 Risk

Midlothian school meals already provide above the Scottish average in Primary and High school meals (70.3% primary/ 86.2% Universal P1-3 free meals, High schools 60%). **Source: Scottish Government Healthy Living Survey published September 2019.**

Sustaining higher meal numbers from August 2020, if the pilot is successful, will prove problematic in the older school estate kitchens facilities. Heavy equipment such as ovens, dishwashers etc. are becoming more difficult and costly to maintain.

Higher meal numbers will require more capacity for storage, particularly low temperature storage (fridge & freezer). Smaller kitchens e.g. St David's Primary, Stobhill Primary may require more deliveries increasing demand on food contracts.

Staff sickness absence incidence and management and vacancies recruitment time causes service issues impacting the ability to provide all the services required at meal times.

Catering supervisors are dealing with more complex dietary needs, both from medical & life style requirements. The service has limited access to knowledge required to meet the needs of the more complex diets.

As this is a pilot phase continuation of the meal provision is dependent on the Scottish Government providing sufficient funding continuing.

### 3.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☒ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☒ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

### 3.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Early Years & reducing child poverty.

The provision of free meals as part of the Early Years expansion will aid families on low income by providing a nutritious mid-day meal. As this is universally available it will reduce any stigma associated with a means tested benefit. This will benefit the child in the learning setting with concentration and behaviours.

Economic Growth & Business Support.

Creating a number of new sessional part-time posts encourages people returning to the work place or with caring duties to apply to work within the Council. This generates more income within the area and a reduction in the need for income support.

Catering services deal with a number of local food suppliers and increased meal numbers will increase demand for their products.

Positive Destinations for Young People.

Catering services regularly provides work experience opportunities for young people both in PAVE projects or school 3<sup>rd</sup> year work experience. Adding nursery element will introduce these students to the Early Years setting and may encourage them to apply for training and employment in this area.

### 3.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Introduction of nursery meals will increase productivity within school meal kitchens.

### 3.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Providing meals in the Early Years setting works to support various health & equality initiatives for pre-school children (obesity reduction, healthy eating etc.). Part of the meal experience involves nursery staff discussing food and related health & sustainability topics with the children.

### **3.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

Catering staff at management and kitchen level have worked in partnership with the Early Years pilot implementation teams to ensure that the service meets the needs of the users and follows the guidance from the Scottish Government.

Catering management have been involved in the planning process from the start of the pilot project and worked with the project team to plan and build capacity for the increasing number of meals.

On-site catering staff work closely with the nursery settings on a daily basis to provide the meal service needed for that day.

### **3.8 Ensuring Equalities**

No Midlothian EQIA required as a Scottish Government policy initiative that has been subject to equalities assessment.

### **3.9 Supporting Sustainable Development**

Not applicable

### **3.10 IT Issues**

None

## **5 Recommendations**

Council is recommended to note meantime the activities across the services to deliver the additional meal and nutritional requirements in the piloted Early Years projects, as the demand is anticipated to expand in any mainstreaming of the service.

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**Background Papers:**

None