



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD 25<sup>th</sup> JULY 2006

### SUMMARY OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT: INVESTIGATION INTO SCHOOL MEALS

#### **Purpose/Background:**

The aims of the scrutiny review were to investigate school meals in Middlesbrough following growing concerns nationally in respect of food quality and standards of service.

#### **Terms of Reference:**

A number of key issues were identified in relation to this scrutiny topic and these formed the basis of the panel's terms of reference, as follows:

- To assess the effectiveness of the school meals service in terms of cost effectiveness, take-up and healthy eating.
- To assess the effectiveness of the Healthy Schools Programme and its impact on school meals provision in Middlesbrough.
- To examine the local impact of increased levels of funding nationally on the school meals service.
- To consider what steps are being taken to meet the requirements of the Government's "Turning the Tables" school meals programme, together with any other national initiatives.
- To consider whether measures are in place to adequately publicise and educate in relation to healthy eating and the benefits of the school meals service and to assess the views of stakeholders in relation to school meals.
- To determine the effectiveness of local breakfast club arrangements.
- To consider information on the link between nutrition and educational attainment/performance.
- To consider the contribution made by the school meals service to the "Being Healthy" aim of the Government's Every Child Matters Programme.

**Findings:**

Evidence was gathered via discussions with officers from Children, Families and Learning and from Middlesbrough Primary care Trust; from two visits to schools at lunchtime and from discussions with catering and school staff and with pupils.

Having considered detailed evidence on the terms of reference, and also in relation to other relevant areas which arose during the course of the investigation, the panel made a number of conclusions and recommendations.

**Conclusions:**

Based on the evidence considered during the investigation, the Panel concluded that:

1. The school meals service gives Middlesbrough Council an opportunity to make a real difference to children's health and attainment.
2. The Council recognised the benefits of healthy eating some years ago and has already made significant improvements in terms of school meal provision.
3. In terms of unit cost, Middlesbrough already spends above regional and national averages.
4. The Council exceeds requirements in terms of training of kitchen supervisors and cooks.
5. Service provision, quality and variety of food and nutritional standards are excellent.
6. There is room for improvement in the overall numbers of children taking school meals.
7. There is a need to maximise take up of free school meals.
8. In terms of the overall issue of healthy eating, education and publicity is important - both in terms of children and parental influence.
9. Given the number of children who do not take school meals, unhealthy packed lunches and children buying unhealthy lunches outside school are issues which require further attention.
10. Valuable links are being developed with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust in respect of the joint promotion of healthy eating.
11. There may be resource implications in implementing the requirements of the guidelines produced by the Government in its "Turning The Tables" report on school meals.

**Recommendations:**

As a result of the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the scrutiny panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

1. That the scrutiny panel's findings in respect of the excellent standard and nutritional quality of school meal provision in Middlesbrough be publicised as widely as possible.
2. That in order to increase take up of school meals a campaign is launched to actively influence pupils and parents and to publicise the service and its benefits. This should use all appropriate publicity methods such as Middlesbrough News, press releases, the local media, letters to parents, posters and leaflets and should highlight typical menus/food available. The campaign should include publicity of free school meals to also encourage their increased take up.
3. That increased take up be also encouraged by all schools promoting the opportunity for parents to try the meals available at their child's school.
4. That the benefits of healthy lunches are actively promoted for those children who do not currently take school meals. This should include materials targeted at each school, pupils, parents and teaching staff in relation to packed lunches, including providing suggestions for healthy lunch boxes.
5. That the importance of encouraging children to choose a balanced meal is recognised and that this is reflected in staff training.
6. That representations be made at a national level regarding the adverse budget implications for some Middlesbrough schools as a result of changes to transitional grant funding arrangements based on the percentage of pupils registered for free school meals.
7. That funding is identified to ensure that the guidelines produced by the Government in its "Turning The Tables" report on school meals can be implemented in full.
8. That in recognition of the links between healthy eating and general health-related issues including obesity, joint working initiatives continue to be developed with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust to maximise action in these areas, particularly in respect of promoting the benefits of school meals.
9. That, when considering the provision of any new school builds in Middlesbrough - for example under the Building Schools for the Future programme - it is imperative that such schools include full kitchen facilities to allow for the preparation of hot meals on site.

**COUNCILLOR LINDA WILSON, CHAIR OF CHILDREN & LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**



## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**25<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2006**

### **FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL: INVESTIGATION INTO SCHOOL MEALS**

#### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its review of school meals in Middlesbrough.

#### **BACKGROUND/AIMS OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION**

2. The issue of school meals has gained a high profile in recent times, particularly as a result of the 2005 television series "Jamie's School Dinners." The TV series highlighted a national decline in standards of school food and, amidst growing public concern and media coverage, resulted in the topic being identified by the Government as a priority requiring urgent action.
3. The principal aim of the scrutiny exercise was to investigate the position in Middlesbrough in respect of school meals. This was particularly in the context of healthy eating and the importance of diet in terms of children's overall health and well being. The scrutiny panel sought to determine what action has been taken, or is planned, on these important issues locally.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

4. The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:
  - To assess the effectiveness of the school meals service in terms of cost effectiveness, take-up and healthy eating.
  - To assess the effectiveness of the Healthy Schools Programme and its impact on school meals provision in Middlesbrough.
  - To examine the local impact of increased levels of funding nationally on the school meals service.
  - To consider what steps are being taken to meet the requirements of the Government's "Turning the Tables" school meals programme, together with any other national initiatives.
  - To determine the effectiveness of local breakfast club arrangements.
  - To consider whether measures are in place to adequately publicise and educate in relation to healthy eating and the benefits of the school meals service and to assess the views of stakeholders in relation to school meals.
  - To consider information on the link between nutrition and educational attainment/performance.
  - To consider the contribution made by the school meals service to the "Being Healthy" aim of the Government's Every Child Matters Programme.
5. The Scrutiny Panel undertook a fairly short but in-depth investigation and met formally on four occasions between 21 February and 4 May 2006 to consider evidence relating to this review. In addition, panel members visited two local schools.
6. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Performance and Policy co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the review. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.

7. A detailed record of the topics discussed at Panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Committee Management System (COMMIS), which can be accessed via the Council's website at [www.middlesbrough.gov.uk](http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk).
8. A summary of the methods of investigation is outlined below:
  - (a) Detailed officer presentations, supplemented by oral evidence.
  - (b) Visits to two local schools (one primary and one secondary) to observe meal arrangements, speak to pupils and staff and try the food.
  - (c) The submission of written evidence from Teesside University.
  - (d) The submission of written and oral evidence from Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust.
9. The report has been compiled on the basis of evidence gathered at scrutiny panel meetings using the methods listed above. Background information has been obtained from the documents listed at the end of the report.

#### **MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL**

10. The membership of the Scrutiny Panel was as follows:

Councillor Wilson (Chair);  
Councillor Mrs H Pearson OBE (Vice-Chair); and Councillors Booth, McPartland, Rooney, B Taylor and Williams; plus co-optees: Father G Holland, E Orr and M White.

#### **THE PANEL'S FINDINGS**

11. The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of each of the terms of reference investigated are set out below.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: *"To assess the school meals service in terms of cost effectiveness, take-up and healthy eating."***

12. Issues which were examined by the scrutiny panel were as follows:

- Service provision
- Healthy eating
- Levels of take up of school meals
- Prices charged for meals and the unit costs of providing meals
- Free school meals
- Packed lunches

13. The panel's findings on each of these areas are shown below.

### **Service Provision**

14. The Council's catering service currently provides school meals via service level agreements with individual schools to all but one of the 51 schools in the Borough. The one school that opted out of this arrangement (Newlands FCJ) is now in the process of returning to Council service provision. All but four schools have kitchens on site where meals are prepared fresh daily. In the case of the schools without catering facilities, hot meals are brought in from other kitchens.

### **Healthy Eating**

15. The school meals service is clearly in a position to promote and influence the issue of a healthy diet and, over the past few years, has moved towards greater healthy meal provision. This has involved officers working with head teachers and catering unit supervisors to encourage children to try healthier foods and to make food choices in the right combinations.

16. As a result, the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables has increased. Rice and pasta are now very popular and jacket potatoes, wedges and boiled potatoes are offered instead of chips or roast potatoes. Chips are no longer available daily but only occasionally and most products that used to be fried are now oven baked.

17. Meals at each school are planned on a weekly basis using a menu plan that is prepared by each catering unit supervisor. Examples of menu plans were made available to the scrutiny panel. The following are key points in relation to menus and ingredients:

- No foods containing mechanically recovered meat are served.
- The majority of products - including sausages and burgers - are oven baked and not fried.
- Better quality convenience foods are being sourced - for example turkey burgers containing 100 % breast meat.
- Pizza is home made and does not contain the additives of a ready prepared product. Bases are made with wholemeal flour as a proportion to the white.
- There are no fizzy drinks available, only water and fruit juice.

18. In order to encourage healthier food choices, catering management and kitchen staff interact with the children over the lunchtime period. Staff also advise on balanced diets and food choices and this very important role is acknowledged by the scrutiny panel. Although there is no national or legal requirement for catering staff to be qualified, all Unit Supervisors and cooks are trained to NVQ Levels 1 and 2 in Food Preparation and Cooking. Unit Supervisors have also taken part in a further distance learning qualification in 'Healthy Eating'. This is a work book based course which enables the supervisors to focus on, and further develop, healthier choices when planning menus.
19. In addition to the above, the scrutiny panel found that salad bars have now been established in most primary schools. These are in the process of being introduced into the remainder of primary schools, and also into secondary schools, as part of a rolling programme. The salad bars have proved to be very popular and make a significant contribution to the healthy eating agenda. Panel members who visited two schools in Middlesbrough as part of the scrutiny exercise saw first hand that the salad bars appear to be very popular additions to the school dining rooms. In general, pupils are able to get four of the recommended five daily portions of fruit and vegetables from a school lunch. This is in addition to the daily piece of fruit which is given to each primary school child at Key Stages 1 and 2 as part of a national scheme. Nursery school children also receive free milk each day, which, in Middlesbrough has recently been changed to semi-skimmed from the full fat variety.
20. The scrutiny panel found that work being done in schools to make children aware of healthy eating issues is closely linked to work and initiatives being undertaken by the Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust (PCT). Accordingly, a representative of the PCT was invited to participate in the scrutiny process. The results of this exercise are highlighted in paragraph 71 onwards.

#### **Price of School Meals/ Unit Food Costs**

21. Current prices charged for school meals are as follows:
  - Primary - £1.50 per day/£7.50 per week
  - Secondary - £1.60 per day/£8.00 per week
22. Owing to the costs of operating the school meals service (food costs, labour costs and other overheads) the service is not run at a profit but is subsidised by the Council.
23. Detailed information was considered by the scrutiny panel on unit food costs, which vary from school to school depending on overheads, staff numbers etc. Average unit costs in Middlesbrough are as follows:



- Primary schools - 52p spent on each meal
- Secondary schools - 68p spent on each meal
- Average cost - 60p spent per meal

24. Unit costs can be compared with other local authorities across the region as follows:

Authority	Average Unit Cost Per Meal/£ (Primary)	Average Unit Cost Per Meal/£ (Secondary)	Average Unit Cost Per Meal/£ (All Schools)
Middlesbrough	0.52	0.68	0.60
Authority A	0.41	0.64	0.525
Authority B	0.49	0.45	0.47
Authority C	0.47	0.45	0.46
Authority D	0.42	0.65	0.535
Authority E	0.52	-	-

25. Nationally, the average unit cost of a school meal is £0.37, as compared to £0.60 in Middlesbrough. The Government has indicated that the additional funding which is to be spent nationally on school meals (see paragraph 44) should be used, in part, to increase spending on ingredients to a minimum of 50p in primary schools and 60p in secondary schools. As has been indicated above, Middlesbrough already spends above these amounts.

#### **Take Up of School Meals**

26. It is estimated by the Child Poverty Action Group that one in four children in the UK do not get a hot meal in the evening. Given this fact, and the importance of nutrition in children's development, take up of school meals is a fundamental issue.
27. There are approximately 16,800 children attending schools in Middlesbrough. On average, approximately 10,400 meals are served each day with the biggest school serving over 750 meals.
28. In terms of overall take up there are wide variations between schools:

- In primary schools the average take up figure is 66%.
  - Individual primary schools take up varies between 52% and 85%.
  - In secondary schools the average take up figure is 52%.
  - Individual secondary schools take up varies between 37% and 81%.
  - In special schools the average take up figure is 77%.
  - Individual special schools take up varies between 68% and 83%.
29. Although officers from Children, Families and Learning make every effort to promote the benefits of school meals, there are a number of factors which affect take up. The most significant factor is individual choice, whether this is exercised by a parent or child.
30. Other factors include cost (particularly where families have several children), quality and choice of food, quality of service, dining environment and facilities and also the influence of teaching and serving staff at an individual school. The weather can also affect meal numbers, meaning that in each school there can be a significant variation in levels of take up from day to day. For example, panel members who visited Acklam Grange Secondary School heard that up to 200 additional meals can be required on rainy days.
31. Children, who do not take school meals either go home for lunch, take packed lunches or (in the case of secondary school children) visit local shops and purchase food there.
32. Although all schools offer the opportunity for parents to visit the school to see and try the food which is available, the panel heard that this opportunity is actively encouraged in some schools (eg Captain Cook Primary School) more than others. This is aimed at showing parents the high standard and quality of meals and service and has resulted in increased take up in some cases. the panel found that this opportunity
33. Take up of free school meals was also recognised as a very important issue by the scrutiny panel and was addressed as a separate aspect of the scrutiny exercise. The issue of packed lunches is also linked and is addressed separately in the report (at paragraph 40 onwards).

### **Free School Meals**

34. Free meals are available to a child whose family meets qualifying criteria based on level of income and benefits received. An application form is sent to all parents when a child takes up a place at a new school. Officers also publicise the service and produce information leaflets and guidance, which is made available to parents.

35. Although the Council recognises the importance of maximising take up of free meals there is an obvious difficulty achieving this in that neither the local authority or individual schools are aware of whether a particular pupil would qualify. There is therefore an unknown number of parents - potentially significant in quantity - who are entitled to claim free meals but who do not do register for the service. By virtue of the fact that these parents are unknown it is obviously difficult to ensure that take up in this area is increased. Schools may be best placed to identify pupils who qualify for free meals - some head teachers are known to encourage registration and take up, although this is a matter for individual schools.
36. In terms of take up against pupils who are registered for free meals in Middlesbrough, 60% of eligible secondary school pupils and 87% of eligible primary school children make use of the service. However, take up levels as a percentage of pupils registered varies significantly between schools, as follows:

	School with highest take up of free school meals as a % of pupils registered	School with lowest take up of free school meals as a % of pupils registered	Average take up of free school meals as a % of pupils registered
Primary Schools	100%	74%	87%
Secondary Schools	80%	41%	60%

37. The fact that in some cases there is such a low take up where pupils are eligible for free meals is of concern to the scrutiny panel. This is especially when considering that, in a lot of cases, the recipients of free school meals can be the most vulnerable and needy of children. If these children are buying meals/food elsewhere, or are bringing in food from home, this will also represent an extra cost to low income families. In the worst cases, children could be having nothing to eat during the lunch break.
38. A major issue that can affect levels of take up of free meals is one of social stigma. Lunchtime procedures in Middlesbrough ensure that children who receive these meals are not publicly identified. Nevertheless, stigma is still a valid issue which does affect take up and which may, at least in part, account for the figures of non-take up which have been identified. This may be particularly the case in secondary schools as stigma surrounding issues relating to low income families is not generally as prevalent in primary schools.

39. A further issue relating to the number of pupils registered for free school meals is that this plays an important part in decisions on how much funding an individual school receives:
- Part of a school's budget share (ie the revenue funding distributed by the Council) relates to deprivation and special educational needs. Free school meal entitlement is used as a measure for these criteria. In 2006/07, for every pupil registered as entitled to free school meals, a primary school receives almost £570 and a secondary school receives just under £830. In addition, secondary schools with free school meal entitlement of over 30% receive an extra £775 for each pupil over the 30% threshold.
  - The Government has announced a new element of School Standards Grant, payable from September 2006, with an emphasis on deprivation and lower levels of attainment. Of this, 35% will be weighted according to free school meals entitlement.
  - The Leadership Incentive Grant for secondary schools is being phased out over the next two years, but schools with above 20% free school meal entitlement receive the transitional grant in full, and those below this threshold have a reduced grant. One secondary school has lost £84,000 in 2006/07 because it was 17 pupils short of the 20% threshold.

#### **Packed lunches**

40. The issue of packed lunches was considered as an issue closely related to take up of school meals. The issues surrounding why some children do not eat school meals have been considered earlier in this report (paragraph 26 onwards). Whatever the reasons, in Middlesbrough, 34% of primary school children and 48% of secondary school children do not eat school meals. Of these children, a significant number take packed lunches to school.
41. Members who visited the two Middlesbrough schools to observe lunch arrangements (see paragraph 80 onwards) were able to see first hand the types of foods brought into schools in children's lunch boxes. Despite the fact that school and catering staff promote healthy eating it appears that there is a significant level of children at both primary and secondary school who take unhealthy foodstuffs as staple items of their lunch. In the worst cases, some children do not take sandwiches but eat only items such as crisps and chocolate. The panel did, however, see examples of healthy lunch boxes containing sandwiches made with wholemeal bread, fruit and fruit juice. The Council's Catering Officer confirmed that the two schools visited showed a typical cross-section of the packed lunches which Middlesbrough children are taking in to schools.

42. Secondary school children who were eating packed lunches during the panel's visit and who were questioned by members of the scrutiny panel appeared to be aware of the issues surrounding healthy eating, even where the contents of their packed lunches were not particularly healthy. Some responded to say they preferred items such as white bread, while others said that they would have a healthy meal or cooked main meal with their family on an evening. Primary school children who were asked why they did not eat school dinners typically replied that they "don't like them".
43. The Panel considers that the main issue arising from examining the above term of reference relates to the need for the Council to ensure that it not only provides a healthy school meals service but promotes its benefits and maximises take up.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: *"To examine the local impact of increased levels of national funding on school meals"***

44. Nationally, the Government has identified the sum of £220m over three years as transitional funding in order to significantly improve the quality of schools meals. Local authorities are expected to lead the development and implementation of a local strategy to deliver a high quality, sustainable school meals service in partnership with other stakeholders such as parents, schools and health services.
45. The £220m funding will be delivered through two new grants to Local Authorities and schools, to be distributed via the existing Standards Fund. These are:
  - a) The School Meals Grant - a non-ringfenced grant to schools.
  - b) The Targeted School Meal Grant - a ringfenced grant to education authorities.
46. At a national level, some schools do not have kitchens or any facilities to provide hot food and serve only sandwiches and cold food. Additional Government funding will therefore need to be used to build kitchens in some cases. As hot meals are already available in all Middlesbrough schools the additional funding which is being made available can be used to improve service provision and upgrade facilities.
47. Although the School Meals Grant can be paid directly to individual schools, it has been agreed that, to maximise benefits, Middlesbrough schools will pool the funding. This funding, together with, is to be spent against an agreed programme, details of which were made available to the scrutiny panel. Year 1 funding will be spent as follows and summarised as follows:

Extending salad bar provision  
Improving dining room furniture  
Staff training to NVQ Level 1 and 2

TOTAL £74,306

48. The Targeted School Meals Grant is to be spent as follows in year 1:

Improving servery counters, including new serving equipment and containers  
Purchase of chilled counters for salad bars  
Modernisation of kitchen at Ormesby Comprehensive

TOTAL £80,530

49. Spending proposals for years 2 and 3 funding will be subject to future determination.
50. The Panel considers that the examination of the above term of reference shows that funding of school meals has been identified as an important national issue. The additional funding which will be available will allow improvements to be made to the service in Middlesbrough.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “To consider what steps are being taken to meet the requirements of the Government’s “Turning the Tables” school meals programme, together with any other national initiatives.”**

51. The School Meals Review Panel (SMRP) was established at a national level by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in May 2005 as part of a Government initiative aimed at transforming school meals. The panel’s work was set against a backdrop of increasing concern about the quality of children’s diets; rapidly increasing rates of childhood obesity and other diet-related diseases; government policies seeking real improvements in public health; and increasing popular demand for a change to school meals.
52. The panel comprises people from different professions and backgrounds, including headteachers, governors, school caterers, professionals with practical experience in implementing healthy eating initiatives in schools, registered dieticians and nutritionists, public health experts, consumer and environmental group representatives, parents and the food industry.
53. The SMRP’s aim is to advise on a major revision of school meals to deliver a reduction in pupils’ consumption of fat, salt and sugar; and to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables and foods containing essential nutrients. Advice will be provided on practical work, which will be needed to implement new nutritional standards. In addition, new qualifications and training are being developed for school caterers.

54. SMRP realises that successful implementation of its objectives will mean thinking about far broader issues than providing food at lunchtime. These include: other food available in schools; other aspects of schools including food related-teaching; how much physical activity is encouraged in schools; food purchased outside the school or prepared at home and brought in; and wider issues such as how schools can support local economies and environmental sustainability.
55. The work of the SMRP includes considering scientific evidence relevant to developing the detail of the nutritional standards. A challenging task will be to develop a route to the successful implementation of the nutritional standards. The national panel has found that some local authorities already work to provide good quality and nutritious food for their children and, as a result, have seen increases in the uptake and enjoyment of school meals.
56. A report titled “Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food” was published by the SMRP in October 2005.
57. The scrutiny panel heard that the key points contained in the “Turning the Tables” report are as follows:
  - The introduction of mandatory standards for school meals - to include not less than two portions of fruit and vegetables per child per day; oily fish on a regular basis; easy access to fresh drinking water; and controlling children’s choices so that they cannot opt out of healthy food.
  - The introduction of stringent nutrient-based standards stipulating essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals required in school meals.
  - Banning low quality foods high in fat, salt and sugar.
  - Banning reformed or reconstituted foods made from “meat slurry”.
  - Banning chocolate, crisps and sugary fizzy drinks from vending machines.
  - A requirement for all schools to work towards serving hot meals, cooked on site from fresh, seasonal ingredients. These should be sourced from local suppliers and farmers where possible.
  - The need to train all catering staff and supervisors to support children in making healthy choices.
  - Schools should consider whole-school food policies to take into account packed lunches and other food brought into school.
  - Prioritisation of refurbishment of school kitchens under school capital programmes.

(Cont....)

- School audits of food service and curriculum and develop a whole-school food and nutrition policy which is available to parents and carers.
  - Schools should aim for complete take-up of free school meals.
58. The Turning the Tables report contains 35 recommendations, which cover the above points. All of these recommendations were considered by the scrutiny panel, together with information relating to Middlesbrough's implementation of each of them.
59. The Council recognised the importance of healthy eating in terms of school meals a number of years ago and has not just decided to take action following recent publicity of the issue. Action has already been taken in a lot of the areas highlighted by Turning the Tables and Council policy is to be drawn up to ensure compliance with all of the requirements of the recommendations. Cost implications will need to be considered in some cases - for example in relation to the recommendation to use a computer software package to analyse the nutritional content of food.
60. The Panel considers that the main issue arising from examining the above term of reference is the need to ensure that all national requirements on healthy eating are addressed.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “*To consider information on the link between nutrition and educational attainment/performance.*”**

61. It is often stated that there is a link between nutrition/diet and educational attainment and performance. The scrutiny panel sought to examine evidence on this issue and ascertain whether this link is proven.
62. The University of Teesside provided information on this topic in the form of three papers and studies produced by academics nationally and internationally. Key points contained in the papers, and studies related to the papers, showed that :
- Children at nutritional risk took longer to process information in a memory test.
  - A series of studies has shown positive effects of breakfast on school attendance, nutrient intake and cognitive skills.
  - The effects of sudden fasting are more pronounced in the case of well nourished children (possibly because malnourished children become used to that state of affairs)
  - Nutrition affects educational achievement by being closely connected to a wide range of general health factors, such as low birth weight, incidences of common illness and days absent from school, deafness and speech defects and amount and type of exercise.



- There has been a link established between diet and nutrition during pregnancy and intellectual performance of a child at 7 and 11 years of age.
  - Hungry/undernourished children are irritable, apathetic and physically inactive - characteristics which all have a negative impact on learning.
  - There is a relationship between weight, height and cognitive performance.
  - Better nutrition is associated with positively influencing neurological development.
63. The Panel considers that examination of the above term of reference confirms that there is an important link between nutrition and educational attainment.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “ *To determine the effectiveness of local breakfast club arrangements.*”**

64. There are currently 27 breakfast clubs operating at schools in Middlesbrough. The scrutiny panel considered details of one example, which was the breakfast club which has been established in Easterside. This is typical of breakfast clubs throughout the Borough.
65. The “Kids Crew” initiative was established in 2003/04 to support children in the Easterside community who were at risk from exclusion from mainstream services. The scheme, which is managed and co-ordinated by the Middlesbrough SureStart Business Team, is funded from various sources including the Children’s Fund, the Easterside Neighbourhood Manager, SureStart and Easterside Primary School. Multi-agency and partnership working is a key aspect of the project. Kids Crew, which includes a breakfast club, is becoming increasingly successful and popular with children within the Easterside Community.
66. The breakfast club is based at Easterside Primary School and is available for key stage 2 children and any siblings from key stage 1 who attend that school and St. Thomas More RC Primary School. The club is open from 8:15am - 9:00am and costs 30p per child per day. Families who have three or more children attending are charged 20p per child per day. There are currently 45 - 50 children attending the breakfast club each day from a total of 90 - 100 children who have registered.
67. Children attending can have cereal, toast and unlimited amounts of fruit, fresh fruit juices and water. When the children have finished their breakfast they have the opportunity to interact in play opportunities. Afterwards, staff accompany the children to their respective schools and supervise them until they are inside.

68. The project offers and achieves positive outcomes for children, addressing the five outcomes of the Government's Every Child Matters campaign.
69. The breakfast club ensures that those children who attend have a nutritious, healthy breakfast at the start of the school day. This has been shown to directly increase concentration levels and motivation and improve behaviour. The two schools involved have expressed the view that the club has had a direct affect on attendance rates, punctuality and performance levels.
70. The Panel considers that examination of the above term of reference confirms the value and importance of breakfast club provision.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “*To consider whether measures are in place to adequately publicise and educate in relation to healthy eating and the benefits of the school meals service and to assess the views of stakeholders in relation to school meals*”**

#### **Links with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust**

71. During its investigations the scrutiny panel learned of links which have been formed between Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the Council in relation to a number of health initiatives. These links, which include healthy eating initiatives in local primary schools, aim to educate and publicise the benefits and importance of healthy eating as well as directly improving diets. The panel sought to explore the effectiveness of links with the PCT.
72. Jan Fallon - Head of Health Improvement at Middlesbrough PCT - attended a meeting of the scrutiny panel to provide information and answer Members' questions in this area.
73. There is good partnership working and strong links have been established between the school meals service and the PCT, particularly with regard to healthy eating and the Healthy Schools award. The PCT has helped to develop and implement local strategies in partnership with the Council via bodies such as the Obesity Sub-Group and Child Obesity Sub-Group. Work is also undertaken by school nurses, who are closely involved with obesity issues and who hold monthly meetings with many partners, including the Council.
74. Joint working with the local authority in relation to school meals is not done in isolation and as a separate issue but is closely linked to the PCT's overall aims and objectives. As such, there are close links between school meals and healthy eating initiatives and work in areas such as sports development and the Healthy Schools initiative.

75. The PCT has been involved in a number of relevant initiatives, including the provision of free water bottles to every pupil in Middlesbrough Schools; providing access to free swimming sessions for all children during the summer break; and cross country events in all primary schools, with a free pedometer and certificate for all pupils. These initiatives contribute towards the Healthy Schools agenda and the 'Being Healthy' section of the Every Child Matters framework.
76. As an example of the wide ranging PCT work which is closely related to the issues surrounding healthy school meals, the scrutiny panel considered a paper entitled "Tackling Obesity" which has been drafted by the PCT. The paper contains details of the PCT's Obesity Strategy, examples of good practice, details of a survey entitled 'Prevalence of Obesity among Secondary School Children in the Middlesbrough PCT area' (a copy of which was also presented to members of the Panel) and also refers to the Healthy Schools Programme and community based work.
77. The PCT also arranged a very successful conference, involving a range of partners (including the Council), on childhood obesity. The conference considered and promoted examples of good practice in relevant areas, including diet, nutrition and meals. A school "Tool Kit" has also been produced, which includes information on healthy snack boxes and other promotional materials to help tackle obesity. Action is needed in this area as a recent BMI (body mass index) survey has revealed that, locally, 1 in 3 children are overweight and 1 in 5 are classified as obese. National guidance has now been produced which requires that all primary school pupils from reception to Year 6 are weighed and measured. The aim is to highlight any children at risk from obesity so that this can be addressed at an early stage.
78. A link has also been established between deprived areas and obese children in that poorer families tend to have poorer diets - for example with a greater reliance on convenience foods and less consumption of freshly prepared food, including fruit and vegetables. As a direct result, the PCT is also involved in community based work included the 'Trying Something New' scheme in some schools. This encourages children to try healthy foods - usually fruit and vegetables - which they have never eaten, or in some cases never seen, before. Children collect stickers of the new foods that they have tried and on completing a collector's card receive a certificate.
79. In terms of publicising the school meals service, the Council writes to all parents when their child has taken up a school place to remind them of the benefits of healthy eating and of taking school meals. A DVD, entitled "Where We Are Now," which is available to parents, has also been produced which publicises the service and highlights improvements which have been made.

## School Visits

80. The scrutiny panel made two lunchtime visits to schools (Captain Cook Primary and Acklam Grange Secondary) to see meal arrangements first hand and to speak to pupils and staff. The panel found that:
- Dining room layouts were attractive and pleasant.
  - Food was well presented (in terms of appearance, quality, serving arrangements - such as use of modern serving containers etc) with a choice of menus.
  - Food choices were all very healthy - there was no evidence of “junk food” and the panel heard that, for the past year, chips have been available at Acklam Grange only once a week.
  - Staff had a very pleasing and helpful attitude to the children - for example welcoming them by name and encouraging them to try different foods and healthy options.
  - The salad bars appeared to be very popular.
  - Vegetarian choices were available, together with meals, which catered for special dietary requirements such as on religious or medical grounds.
  - Later arrivals for lunch still had a choice of food.
  - There was a reasonably high number of pupils at each school who ate packed lunches. Quite a few of these contained items such as chocolate and crisps, although there were examples of healthier options such as salad and brown bread etc.
81. During the site visits, the scrutiny panel took the opportunity to speak to pupils, catering and teaching staff to ascertain their views:
- Pupils eating school meals found them to be enjoyable and expressed satisfaction at the variety, quality and choice.
  - They have welcomed the introduction of salad bars.
  - They are aware of the importance of healthy eating and a balanced diet.
  - A catering supervisor confirmed that the budget is not overly restrictive and allows her to plan varied menus.
  - A head teacher confirmed that there has been a massive change in menus and a major shift towards healthy school meals in recent years.
  - Two pupils referred to cost as the reason for not eating school meals.
  - A head teacher confirmed that the school does all it can to promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles.
  - A member of the catering staff advised that popular food items are replenished throughout the lunch period to ensure as wide a choice as possible for later diners.
  - A head teacher advised that pupils leaving the school site at lunchtimes is an issue, both in terms of diet and complaints from local residents regarding litter and nuisance.

(Cont....)

- A vegetarian pupil stated that they were satisfied with the variety and standard of vegetarian meals.
82. The Panel considers that examination of the above term of reference shows the need for joint working involving other agencies and the need to make information available on the benefits of school meals and healthy eating.

**TERM OF REFERENCE: “To consider the contribution made by the school meals service to the Government’s ‘Being Healthy’ aim contained in its ‘Every Child Matters’ programme.”**

**AND:**

**“To assess the effectiveness of the Healthy Schools Programme and its impact on school meals provision in Middlesbrough.”**

83. These terms of reference are dealt with together in the report as a number of the issues that were considered in relation to them contain areas of overlap.
84. “Being healthy” is one of five aims promoted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Every Child Matters programme. The other aims are “staying safe”, “enjoying and achieving”, making a positive contribution” and “economic well being. The five aims are to be achieved through effective joint working involving relevant partner agencies and services.
85. As part of the being healthy aim a national Healthy Schools Programme has been developed. A healthy school promotes the health and well-being of its pupils and staff through a well-planned curriculum in a physical and emotional environment that promotes learning and healthy lifestyle choices.
86. The aims of the Healthy Schools Programme are:
- To support children and young people in developing healthy behaviours
  - To help raise pupil achievement
  - To help reduce health inequalities
  - To help promote social inclusion
87. In order to achieve Healthy School status, schools must demonstrate evidence in four core themes, as follows:
- Healthy Eating
  - Personal, social and health education (including sex and relationship education and drug education (including alcohol, tobacco and volatile substance abuse)
  - Physical activity
  - Emotional health and well-being(including bullying)

88. Achieving national Healthy School status enables the school to demonstrate its commitment to the five Every Child Matters outcomes. This also enables schools to support targets contained in the following national priorities:
- Improving behaviour and attendance
  - Improving performance in national Standard Attainment Tests
  - Reducing and halting the increase in childhood obesity
  - Promoting positive sexual health and reducing teenage pregnancy
  - Reducing young people's drug, alcohol and tobacco use.
89. All schools in Middlesbrough, including primary, secondary, academies, special and most pupil referral units (except Kings Academy) are now working on healthy school status. The Government has indicated that every school should be working towards achieving the award by 2009. At a local level, each school will have access to a local Healthy Schools Co-ordinator to provide support through the improvement process.
90. The school meals service will play a key role in ensuring that all schools are able to meet the requirements of the "healthy eating" core theme to achieve healthy school status. There is also a clear link between school meals and national priorities relating to obesity, performance and overall health. These issues are generally covered by this scrutiny investigation.
91. The Panel considers that the issues examined under the above term of reference illustrate that the school meals service can contribute towards achieving national health-related standards.

### **Additional Information**

92. The following sections deal with additional information which was relevant to the scrutiny review and which arose as part of the panel's investigations. This relates to:
- Local purchasing
  - Pupils purchasing lunch from local shops

### **Pupils Purchasing Lunch from Local Shops**

93. A further issue which was relevant to the scrutiny exercise, but which was not covered directly by the terms of reference of the review came to light during the scrutiny panel's work. This was in relation to pupils who do not take school meals but leave the school premises on a lunchtime to buy food from local shops. The issue was raised by a head teacher during one of the panel's school visits and also by a panel member. The head referred to large numbers of pupils visiting local shops and fast food takeaways/outlets.

94. The panel acknowledges that, despite complaints from local residents regarding litter problems and nuisance it appears that schools have no powers to force pupils to stay on site during the lunch break. Schools can, however, require parental permission for pupils to leave the school at lunchtime. While it is unrealistic to foresee a future situation of all pupils either eating school meals, or other healthy options at lunchtime, it is nevertheless considered that the healthy eating issue which this raises is an important one which should be addressed at some point in the future.

### **Local Purchasing**

95. The scrutiny panel questioned whether it would be possible to implement local purchasing agreements, or source supplies locally, for school meal ingredients. This would include meat from local farms for example. It was found that, under existing contract arrangements, the majority of ingredients come from a Tyneside-based supplier. Although local purchasing is an issue that has never been explored in great detail, officers consider that, in the case of fresh meat for example, there would be difficulties associated with its implementation because of the mainly urban nature of Middlesbrough and the relatively few number of local farms. Cost - both in terms of the contract and the impact on the price charged for meals - was also likely to be an issue as the existing contract allowed for bulk purchasing discounts.
96. A further issue on local purchasing relates to just how "local" is "local?" If the Council was to implement local purchasing and - for the reasons outlined above - purchase food from farms/businesses from further afield, such as North Yorkshire, would this necessarily be much different from existing arrangements of purchasing supplies from within the north east region? The scrutiny panel did not seek to explore these matters further but wishes to place on record the fact that this issue was raised for potential future consideration.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

97. Based on the evidence gathered in the scrutiny investigation the Panel concluded that:
1. Service provision, quality and variety of food and nutritional standards are excellent. There is room for improvement in the overall numbers of children taking school meals.
  2. There is a need to maximise take up of free school meals.
  3. In terms of the overall issue of healthy eating, education and publicity is important - both in terms of children and parental influence.

(Cont....)

4. Given the number of children who do not take school meals, unhealthy packed lunches and children buying unhealthy lunches outside school are issues which require further attention.
5. Valuable links are being developed with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust in respect of the joint promotion of healthy eating.
6. There may be resource implications in implementing the requirements of the guidelines produced by the Government in its "Turning The Tables" report on school meals.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. Following the conclusions reached above, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive that:
  1. The scrutiny panel's findings in respect of the excellent standard and nutritional quality of school meal provision in Middlesbrough be publicised as widely as possible.
  2. In order to increase take up of school meals a campaign is launched to actively influence pupils and parents and to publicise the service and its benefits. This should use all appropriate publicity methods such as Middlesbrough News, press releases, the local media, letters to parents, posters and leaflets and should highlight typical menus/food available. The campaign should include publicity of free school meals to also encourage their increased take up.
  3. Increased take up be also encouraged by all schools promoting the opportunity for parents to try the meals available at their child's school.
  4. The benefits of healthy lunches are actively promoted for those children who do not currently take school meals. This should include materials targeted at each school, pupils, parents and teaching staff in relation to packed lunches, including providing suggestions for healthy lunch boxes.
  5. The importance of encouraging children to choose a balanced meal is recognised and that this is reflected in staff training.
  6. Representations be made at a national level regarding the adverse budget implications for some Middlesbrough schools as a result of changes to transitional grant funding arrangements based on the percentage of pupils registered for free school meals.

(Cont.....)



7. Funding is identified to ensure that the guidelines produced by the Government in its "Turning The Tables" report on school meals can be implemented in full.
8. In recognition of the links between healthy eating and general health-related issues including obesity, joint working initiatives continue to be developed with Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust to maximise action in these areas, particularly in respect of promoting the benefits of school meals.
9. When considering the provision of any new school builds in Middlesbrough - for example under the Building Schools for the Future programme - it is imperative that such schools include full kitchen facilities to allow for the preparation of hot meals on site.

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  - Dawn Hogg - Catering Unit Supervisor, Captain Cook Primary School
  - Mick Ramm - Head Teacher, Captain Cook Primary School
  - Janice Johnson - Kitchen Unit Supervisor, Acklam Grange Secondary School
  - John Bate - Head Teacher, Acklam Grange Secondary School
  - Other members of staff and pupils of Captain Cook Primary School and Acklam Grange Secondary School who contributed to the review by speaking to panel members during visits to the schools.

**COUNCILLOR LINDA WILSON  
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17th July 2006

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- (a) Minutes of Children & Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings and site visits: 13 March - 4 May 2006.
- (b) Reports of officers from Children Families and Learning submitted to Children & Learning Scrutiny Panel 13 March - 4 May 2006.
- (c) DfES Report - "Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food - Minimum Standards for School Meals."
- (d) "Food for Life - School Meals and Health" - Soil Association Report.
- (e) DfES Newscentre Press Release - "Transforming School Meals - Setting The Standard."
- (f) Department of Health Policy and Guidance - "Food in Schools Programme - Summary."
- (g) Healthcare Commission Report - "Tackling Childhood Obesity."
- (h) Child Poverty Action Group Report - "Free School Meals for Children Who Need Them."
- (i) "Breakfast and Dietary Balance: the enKid Study."
- (j) "Health and Attainment' - Excerpt from University of Glasgow Report.
- (k) "Effects of Diet on Behaviour and Cognition in Children' - France Bellisle.